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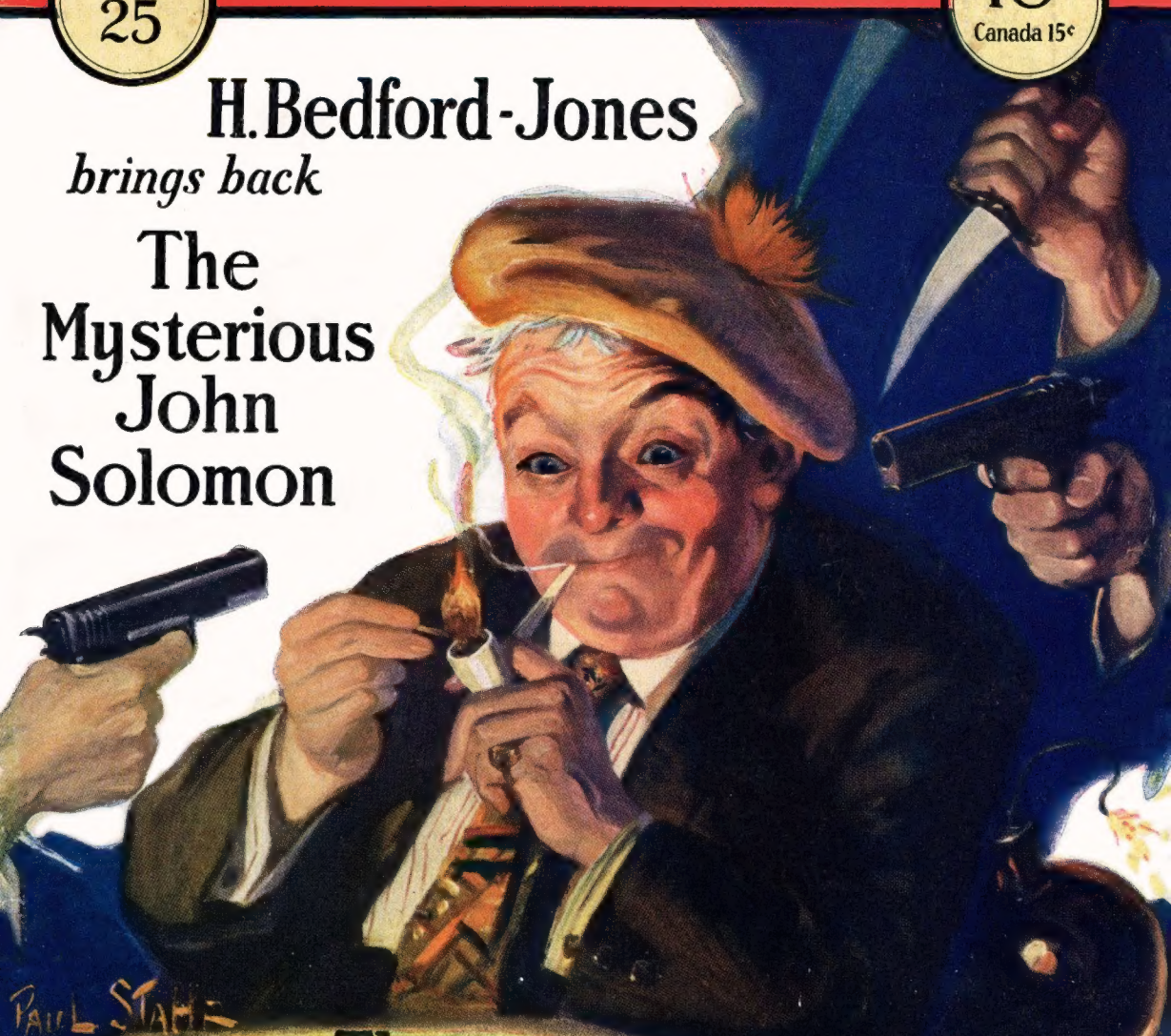

The Lost Punch *A Gillian Hazeltine Story*
by George F. Worts

We Want A Name
for this new wonderful SHAMPOO

This Offer Open to Every Reader of This Announcement

Have you sent a name? If not, do so at once. It makes no difference who you are or where you live, we want you to send us a name for this new and unusual shampoo. Whoever sends the most suitable name will win $1000—nothing else to do.

WIN $1000.00 CASH

Any Name May Win!

No matter how simple you think your suggestion is, you cannot afford to neglect sending it at once! Any name may win. The names of people, flowers, trees, birds, etc., may be submitted, or a coined word or a word made by combining two or more words such as "Sungleam," etc., or your name might suggest the handy new tube container. No bottle to break, leak, or spill, no cake of soap to lie around and collect germs. There is nothing more to do, simply the person sending the most suitable suggestion for a name will receive $1000.00 in cash, or if prompt, $1100.00 in all.

You May Win Thousands Like These Folks Did!

Think of the joy and happiness our check for $1000.00 would mean to you, or if prompt $1100.00 in all. Better still, by participating in our other prize offers, you may win an additional $8000.00, making a total of $9100.00 in all. The two persons whose pictures are reproduced, Mrs. Iola E. Isley, and Mr. A. B. Morren, tied for first prize in our last contest and received cashier's checks dated August 13, 1929.

$3425.00 Paid To Each!

Mrs. Isley is a young married woman, residing with her husband in Virginia. She has a young son and her household duties to look after, but found time to win this handsome prize. Mr. Morren is a native of Holland, and has only been in this country a few years. He is employed by an oil company in Pennsylvania. Think of the pleasure and happiness this prize money will bring to both of these people and their families.

Are you ambitious? Do you, too, want to win a handsome prize? If so, you may be even more successful than these two people have been. Remember, there is no obligation! In addition to the $1000.00 cash prize ($1100.00 in all if prompt), we are also offering one hundred other big cash prizes ranging from $25.00 to $8000.00 as a part of our novel advertising plan. Everyone sending us a name for our shampoo, regardless of whether it wins or not, will be given an opportunity to win the $8000.00 first prize or one of the other one hundred cash prizes.

PARIS AMERICAN PHARMACAL CO.
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$100.00 Extra For Promptness

To get quick action, we are going to pay the winner an extra $100.00 for promptness, or $1100.00 in all, so send your suggestion AT ONCE!

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This contest is open to everyone except members of this firm, its employees and relatives.
Each contestant may send only one name. Sending two or more names will cause all names submitted by that person to be thrown out.
Contest closes April 30, 1930. Duplicate prizes will be given in case of ties.
To win the promptness prize of $100.00 extra, the winning name suggested must be mailed within three days after our announcement is read.

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Date this announcement was read.....

Date my suggestion is mailed.....

Name.....

Address.....

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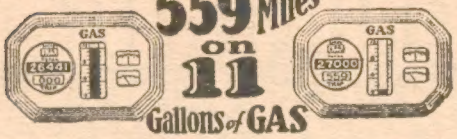

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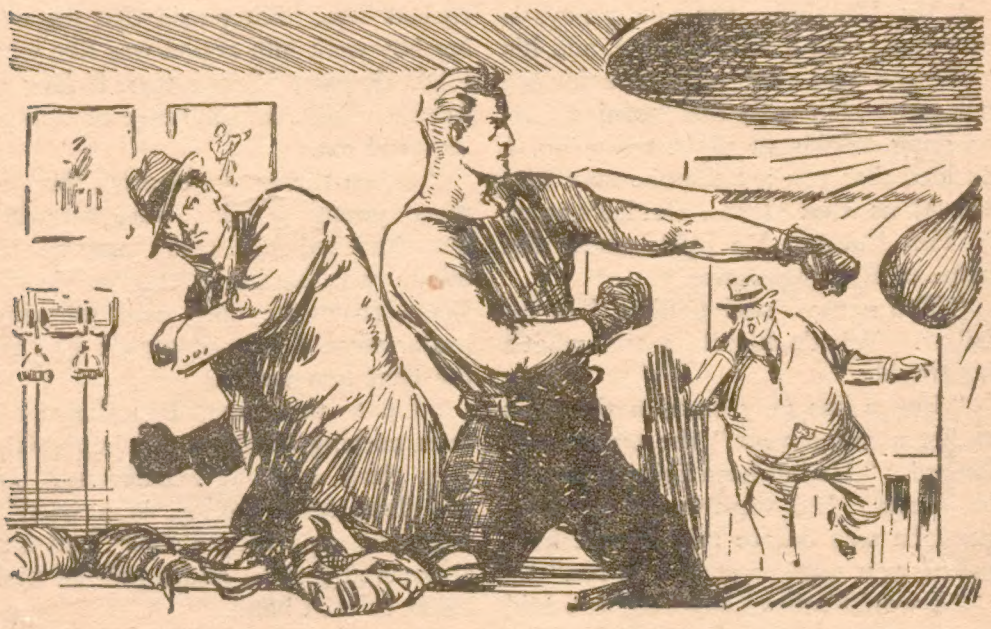
VOLUME 209 SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 1930 NUMBER 5



Tim said later that he didn't hear the warning

The Lost Punch

When Fate stacked things against fighting Tim Bunce, Gillian Hazeltine took a hand in the game—and made ring history

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "A Reptile Named Robard," "The Haunted Yacht Club," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BATTLING BUNCE.

GILLIAN HAZELTINE closed the door, walked over to his desk and selected from a silver humidor a slender blond cigar. Every Christmas the famous criminal lawyer received a thousand of these cigars from a wealthy client whom he had cleverly saved from the electric chair. The client, it chanced, had been innocent.

When the cigar was glowing, he seated himself and looked amiably at the worried little bright-eyed, pink-

cheeked Irishman who was perched like a bird on the edge of the chair beside the desk.

"Well, Paddy?"

Paddy Tobin, trainer and manager of prize fighters, nervously cleared his throat. He looked as if he hadn't had much sleep lately. His face was drawn and there were pouches under his eyes.

"Mr. Hazeltine, one of my boys is in a jam. It's a difficult case, and it's a strange case. It isn't a case for the law courts, but early this morning, after lying awake all night worrying, I decided that you are the one man who can tell us what to do. The lad's name is Tim Bunce. He fights under the name of Battling Bunce."

"The name," said Gillian, "is familiar. What's his class and what's his trouble?"

"Bunce has only been in the fight racket about a year," the trainer answered. "He has been fighting in preliminaries. If I were to tell you how good he was before this trouble happened, you would not believe me."

"I would believe anything *you* told me about any fighter," said Gillian.

"Tim Bunce came to me," Paddy went on, "under somewhat unusual circumstances. A girl whose father I know well—Mike Kelly, a cop on the gas-house beat—came to me about a year ago and said that she was going to bring around a young fellow who was a natural-born killer. She said he was her boy-friend and that she had discovered, after keeping company with him for a couple of years, that he was a two-fisted mauler. It seems they had gone up the river on the Idlewild on one of the Sunday night excursions, and during the trip back a crowd of young rowdies, four or five of them, had been razzing her and Bunce. You know where the Idlewild docks, Mr. Hazeltine—down by the old iron ore dock?"

Gillian nodded.

"WELL," Paddy went on, "when the passengers got off, this gang of roughnecks decided they were going to take Kitty away from Tim. And they tried to. They rushed Tim. Kitty said that the way her boy went into action was like what might happen if you tossed four or five fat rabbits into the cage of a starving wild cat.

"When the smoke cleared, three of those young gorillas were stretched out—knocked out cold; one of the others was having a terrible hemorrhage from the nose, and the ringleader wore a pair of purple eyes for the next two weeks.

"Up to that time, Tim Bunce had been nothing in the world but a shipping clerk down at Harnegan's. He had done some boxing, in a friendly way, but apparently nobody had ever discovered that he had a pair of mule hoofs in each hand.

"Knowing how girls are apt to boast about their boy-friends, I was pretty skeptical. But I told Kitty to bring the boy around. Next evening she brought him up to my gym. He was as clean-cut and well-built a light heavyweight as you ever clapped an eye on; good shoulders, a good head and a good eye. If there was anything wrong with him, it was his modesty. When it came to his own talents, he was a natural born pooh-pooher. Well, you've seen Lefty Schmidt in the ring, haven't you?"

Gillian, with his hands clasped comfortably behind his head, his blond cigar jutting out from his mouth at a rakish angle, nodded. "He's a dirty fighter, but a good one."

"Yes, sir; dirty but good. He was training for his bout with Jim Walker at that time. I asked him if he would put on the gloves with Bunce and see what he had. So the boys put them on. Mr. Hazeltine, you would not have believed it unless you had seen it. Bunce had hardly any style. His footwork was terrible. His stance would have made you laugh out loud; but he walked right into Lefty and he one-twoed him all over that ring! He hit him with everything but the ring posts and buckets. I yelled at Lefty: 'You needn't pull 'em any more. Let's see how he can take 'em now.' And Lefty puffed at me: 'What—do you think I'm doin' this on purpose? Call this mad dog off!'

"And that, Mr. Hazeltine, was how I came to know I had found a natural. In all my ring experience, it was the first time it ever happened. Without an invitation, I had had a boy walk into my gymnasium who had the makings of another Dempsey. That boy had everything! Everything but finish. He had a punch in his two hands like a steam roller swinging on the end of a steel cable. And he loved to fight. And he had the other things: clean-looking, but not too good-looking, and modesty. Another thing: he was built long and lean and rangy, and he weighed a hundred and seventy-two. With careful training, he would work up nicely as a heavyweight."

"WHY," Gillian dryly intruded, "have you been keeping this bright light of yours under a bushel?"

"In the first place," Paddy promptly answered, "I did not want to force him. He was worth a slow building up. I wanted to take my time to teach him form and style. Before he went into the big limelight, I wanted him to be the classiest boy that ever stepped through the ropes. Also, he was too modest. So I started him off easy. When he was already good enough to draw an even break with Jake Mullin and Frankie Walsh, I was keeping him in preliminaries. He has never been in a star bout. I never let him cut loose. I never let him take his man before the third round. I kept him down. At the beginning of the third round, or sometimes even the fourth, I would say: 'All right, Timmy; wipe him up.' And Timmy would go in there and one-two him to death before you knew what was happening.

"I tell you, Mr. Hazeltine, the boy is a born killer! And absolutely obedient and manageable. When he knew how good he was, he did not get a swelled head. He had just one weakness, and that was Kitty Kelly; only it wasn't exactly a weakness. He was crazy about Kitty. And Kitty could handle that big blond cave man as if he was a baby. It was a case of true love on both sides. Kitty knew how good the boy was, but she agreed absolutely with me. He mustn't be forced. Let him take things easy until he was so classy that he would knock them off their feet.

"His girl and I weren't the only ones in on the secret. One day, when the boy was working out up at the gym with Tiger Wales, the colored heavyweight, Jake Mullin dropped in. Jake had just won the light heavyweight championship and he was feeling pretty cocky about it. Jake is a slob anyway. And a snake.

"Jake stood there by the ring, watching the workout, and pretty soon he turned to me and said: 'Paddy, I'd like to put them on with that blond wonder of yours.' Well, Mr. Hazel-

tine, you know how boys are. When I told Tim that the champion wanted to put on the gloves with him, he was tickled and flattered silly. He thought it was a great honor. And I said: 'Never mind the honor stuff. Watch out for that right of his. He used to work in the stockyards, and they say when he got tired of killing beef with a sledge hammer, he used that right.'

"Well, they put them on, Mr. Hazeltine. And Jake Mullin, without a word of warning, let go with that right. He let it go right where he always tries to let it go—into the pit of the stomach.

"Tim saw it coming, and he blocked it with his left, but the force of it sent the boy halfway across the ring. That honored grin came right off, and he went after the big-hearted champion in a way that reminded you of a mother leopard coming out of her cave to defend her young. One-two! One-two! He chased Mr. Champion all over that ring. Finally, he got him into a corner and began lamming away, first to the belly, then to the jaw. But he wasn't quite fast enough for that right. It came up into his face like an exploding flywheel.

"It was the best Jake Mullin had. I doubt if he ever, in any of his knockouts, put over that right so well timed or so hard. It connected with the boy's chin. Down he went! But did he stay down? Nobody was counting, but when you have been in the fight racket as long as I have, you develop a stop-watch instinct in the back of your brain. Mine was ticking them off: one—two—three—four—five—six—

"At six, the boy shook his head. At eight, he rolled over onto his hands and knees. At nine, his gloves were off the floor. But Jake Mullin was out of the ring by then, and saying to me: 'Not half bad, Paddy. That boy is pretty good.' Pretty good! I will tell the world that he is pretty good!"

PADDY nodded emphatically, and then slowly went on: "It was right after that, Mr. Hazeltine, that the trouble began. Jake Mullin met Kitty. And Kitty didn't lose much time getting his goat. You know how the women flock around a champion. Well, Kitty wasn't the flocking kind. She was in love with Tim, and she didn't have any time for Mullin. She told him to roll his hoop. Pretty soon, he wanted her as he'd never wanted anything before in his crooked life. After awhile, he wanted to marry her.

"Kitty kept shoving him off, and saying she didn't even like him, let alone love him. But when he pulled the marriage stuff, it made things different. Not with her. But her mother, her old man, and her two good-for-nothing brothers began taking sides with Mullin. They began riding her. Why was she waiting around for a palooka like Tim Bunce, when she could grab off a gilt-edged guy like Mullin? A real champion!

"They hammered and dinged and harped away at the poor kid until she began to look like a little wreck. Her old man was the worst. You know how prize fighters stand in with the cops, anyway. And old man Kelly was so flattered to have the light heavyweight champ paying attentions to his daughter that he couldn't see straight. Here, he says, is a great chance for her to marry well. A million girls he could name, he says, would snap at the chance."

"Did you," Gillian interrupted, "argue with Kelly?"

"I did! I argued myself black and blue and in circles. I told him that,

given a year's more time, Tim would be at the top of the light heavy division. I told him he would keep puttin' on weight and would, in three years at the outside, be a sensation in heavyweight circles. And he said I was just handing out the usual applesauce of every fight manager.

"Kitty was a stenog then, down in Minturn's brokerage office. She had to be on the job at 9 A.M. Mr. Hazeltine, her old man and those worthless brothers of hers used to keep her out of bed till four and five and six in the morning, wrangling at her about Mullin.

"They finally barred Tim Bunce out of the house, and he and Kitty had to meet on the sly, the poor kids. I'm no soft-hearted sentimentalist, Mr. Hazeltine, but I sure did feel sorry for those kids. They were so crazy about each other, it was pathetic. They used to meet up at the gym, and they just used to sit there in my office, holding hands and not saying anything. Sometimes it made me so mad I could have used a sawed-off shotgun on Mullin and that whole blamed Kelly family. I used to ask them why didn't they run off and get married and to the deuce with the family. But Kitty said no, they had made a sacred agreement not to get married until after Tim had won his first star bout.

"If I had had any sense, I would have built up a star bout for Tim right then—any star bout, and I would have picked a palooka that Tim could take in one soft punch with an eight-ounce glove. But I didn't realize then that Kitty was cracking so fast under the strain.

"One morning, about seven o'clock, I got a telephone call at my boarding house from Kitty. She was having hysterics, laughing and crying. She says she couldn't stand it any longer; she hadn't had three hours' sleep in the past week, and she guessed she was just a weak woman and a coward and a quitter; but things looked so hopeless, she had given in. She said to tell Tim she loved him and she would never love anybody else, but she was going to buy a little peace by marrying Mullin. 'Break the news to Tim,' she says. 'Tell him it's too late to do anything.' Then she began to cry, and I heard some man yelling at her, and she hung up." Gillian nodded.

"THAT was five weeks ago, Mr. Hazeltine," Paddy resumed. "And if what she got was peace, give me war, with liquid fire, mustard gas and all the trimmings! The minute Mullin married her, things were different. His true nature began coming out. It makes me squirm when I think about it. I don't see how any man can treat a girl the way Mullin has treated Kitty. I wish you could see her! Before all this started, she was always pink-cheeked and jolly and full of fun. She was always joking and kidding everybody, and she was always poking fun at Tim the way girls do when they're crazy about a boy. Now, all the life has gone out of her. All the color out of her cheeks. All the sparkle. Big circles under her eyes. She's so white and thin that it just makes you sick to look at her.

"She called Tim up quite a few times, to tell him what a little fool she had been and that she still loved him. The boy just went to pieces. Well, how would you like to have the girl you are crazy about call you up at three in the morning, crying her eyes out, because her husband had just beat her up till she fainted? What could you do? It's none of your business, is

it? He's her husband, isn't he? You keep your nose out of married people's scraps, don't you? Would you have him arrested and drag her name through the tabloids?"

"You might come to a lawyer, as you have done," said Gillian dryly.

"I didn't come to you about that," said Paddy. "Wait till you hear the rest of it. If you don't want to jump in and do all you can for Tim Bunce, then you are a different man than I think you are. Yesterday morning, Mullin tried to kill Tim. Tim is outside in your waiting room. We will send for him in a minute. But I want to tell you the rest of it before you look him over. You may tell him there is nothing to do but to kill Mullin. I mean, it is as serious as that. And if you say, kill Mullin, we will kill Mullin!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TRAINING CAMP.

GILLIAN'S blond cigar had gone out. He relighted it. Whispers of this amazing story that Paddy Tobin was telling him had reached him through underground sources. But he wanted the complete story from Paddy before he made any comment.

"I know now," Paddy went on, "that Mullin is one of these men who get a big kick out of hurting people and seeing them suffer. I have checked up on him. He was always a bully. Even when he was a kid, he was always hurting kids smaller than himself.

"You know, of course, that Mullin is slated to meet Frankie Walsh on the Fourth of July. When Mullin went into training a little over a week ago, he came to see me. He said he wanted to borrow Tim as a sparring partner. Frankie Walsh is a left-hander, and Tim's left is as good as his right; also, Tim is about Walsh's size, and his fighting style is about the same. He is a mixer, like Jack Dempsey. So is Walsh. All in all, said Mullin, Tim would make a fine sparring partner for him.

"Of course I said absolutely nothing doing. Tim was in bad enough shape as it was, without being dragged into that mess. I knew that Kitty was out there at Mullin's camp, living with him in his little cottage there. I knew Tim and she would somehow see each other—and hell would be popping. I didn't want Tim to get hurt, anyway.

"While we were arguing it, Tim came in; and Mullin put it up to him. He told Tim just what he had told me, and added: 'Kiddo, here is a dandy chance for you to work out a defense against that right of mine. One of these days, if you keep getting good, you and I may meet under the bright lights. When that night comes, you want to be able to keep away from me and keep me away from you. How about it?'

"The poor kid didn't hesitate. I knew he wasn't thinking of Mullin's arguments at all. He was thinking of being up there near Kitty—as if it would do him a bit of good! I talked myself black in the face, but it didn't do any good. When Mullin went, Tim went with him. And I tagged along. I didn't want that boy crucified by that big ape if I could help it.

"What happened was just what I figured would happen. I will say for Mullin that he is smart. He is too damned smart. It is the kind of smartness that puts men back of bars, where they belong. I am sure he got a cruel kind of pleasure in seeing Kitty and

Tim face to face across the dining room table. He would make ugly little cracks to them about married life, and how sweet and loving Kitty was when she had her arms around his neck at night.

"I will say for Tim that he acted every minute like a gentleman. I used to see the red shoot up into his face and ears when Mullin's rough stuff got too rough. Tim is a better gentleman than these college-made gentlemen: he is a born gentleman. He kept his mouth shut and did his work.

"And that was where this strange thing happened. At the beginning of that week, it was a toss-up which man was the better fighter. Tim used to one-two Mullin around that ring in a way that was a pleasure for tired eyes. And he kept blocking that right, blocking it until Mullin almost went nuts. Of course, they wore face guards. All the time they were in there, Mullin was razzing the kid; talking to him in whispers. And the kid would not tell me what it was that Mullin was saying. But by the middle of the week, the kid cracked. It didn't happen suddenly. It was slow. His punches began losing their power; his timing began to be bad, and his defense fell off. To me, watching, it was like watching a great solid rock crumbling to pieces for no reason at all."

HAZELTINE broke in: "In this time, did Bunce have any talks with Kitty?"

"No, sir; I was coming to that. He didn't try to talk to her, and she didn't try to talk to him. They treated each other politely. He called her Mrs. Mullin, and she called him Tim. They weren't cold or distant or over-polite; they were just behaving the way any lady and gentleman would behave. You would have thought that there had never been anything more between them than boy and girl friendship. But I bunked in the room with Tim, and I knew different. I would hear him tossing about in his bed, and sometimes groaning or talking in his sleep. And it just made me sick. Mullin might just as well have carved his heart out with a knife.

"Tim did not try to see Kitty on the sly. But one morning, yesterday morning it was, she sent him a note by the dishwasher. She said she must see him, so he told the dishwasher to tell her he would manage it in a few minutes.

"Every morning, when Mullin went out for road work, he made Tim go along, to keep an eye on him. Yesterday, when they started out, Tim went to the first turn in the road, lagging behind. He kept lagging behind, and at the first turn, he dropped out, cut across a field and went to Mullin's cottage.

"Kitty was sitting there on the steps, huddled up against a roof post, her eyes all red from crying. Tim sat down beside her and she says: 'Tim, isn't there anything we can do? I just can't stand it. Look at this!'

"Well, Mr. Hazeltine, Tim looked. She was wearing a dress with long sleeves. She pulled up the sleeves and her arms were one solid mass of black-and-blue marks and bruises. She said she was like that almost all over her body. Mullin had got sore at her last night, and started accusin' her of seein' Tim on the sly, and for the first time she sassed him back. She said he had spoiled her life and Tim's life, and she hated him like the snake he was. And Mullin lit into her. He hit her and he kicked her. Well, I won't go into the details, Mr. Hazeltine.

"The kid finally said to her: 'We have played this thing straight, Kitty. But we are through playing it straight. You are going to pack up. We are going away, and to hell with everything and everybody. We will go West or somewhere.'

"He stopped right there. And the reason he stopped was that Mullin was standin' there right in front of them, with a mean grin on his ugly pan. He had his hands on his hips, and in that dirty white sweatshirt, he looked nine feet tall and six feet wide,

"His jaw was shoved out, and he was grinning at Tim. Tim jumped right up, ready for a knock-down-and-drag-out—ready and willing. But Mullin didn't start it. Mullin doesn't do business that way. Not much! All he did was to jab his thumb over his shoulder toward the gym and say in that sneering voice: 'I'll be seein' you out there in a minute, Bunce.'

"Well, that sounded pretty good to Tim. He figured they would put on lighter gloves than usual, and Mullin would try to kill him legitimately with that right of his. That was jake with Tim. Let him try it! So Tim went into the gym and Mullin went into the cottage with Kitty.

"I was in my room while all this was happening. I heard Kitty yell. Mullin had slapped her up against the sitting room wall with the knuckles of his left hand. Tim, in the gym, heard her cry out with the pain of it. The nearest thing handy was the fast bag. Tim stepped up and began slammin' it, to get some of the red out of his system. He was giving that bag everything he had when I walked in. I was just in time to see Mullin creeping up behind him like a cat ready to spring.

"That bag was going so fast and making so much noise a horse could have walked up behind the kid, and he wouldn't have heard a sound. Mullin crept up behind him, with that steer-killing right of his all doubled up and ready to let go. I yelled. Tim said later he didn't hear me. The next thing he knew, the lights were out.

"I ran on in and I yelled at Mullin that he was a red-handed murderer, and he said: 'Well, what of it? There is an unwritten law in this State, and I killed this louse while defending the honor of my home. Phone for the dead wagon, Tobin. Get this carcass out of here.'

"Well, the kid wasn't dead, although he should have been. That blow had landed flush on the back of his head, and it should have caved in his skull. But it didn't. I got smelling salts and brandy, and in an hour I brought the kid around. Then I rushed him into the City Hospital and had X-rays taken of his head.

"The doctors said his skull must be made of reënforced concrete. There wasn't a crack or a dent in it. All the kid got out of it was a cut that they had to take a few stitches in, and a mean headache.

"But that punch finished what Mullin had started to do earlier in the week. Tim has a fight on to-night. It is his first star bout. This morning, I had him work out with Tiger Wales. Tim has entirely lost his punch. He is buffaloed. As hard as he tries, he cannot punch. If we do not snap him out of it, he will lose this fight to-night sure."

"WHO is Tim's opponent?" Gillian asked.

"Kid Murphy. Kid is tough, but he has nothing but a straight left. He is one of these fancy sharpshooters. He opens you up and then

shoots that left. If Tim were up to form, he would simply push that left aside and chop Kid Murphy into sausage meat. But he is in a bad way."

"Because of that blow on the back of his head?"

"No, sir. That blow did not affect him for more than a few hours. The doctors said there is absolutely no sign of concussion. Physically, Tim is as good as ever. It is all mental. Mr. Hazeltine, I have shot the works. I am up a blind alley. This is not your usual line, but you have got people out of trouble when things looked just as bad as they look now. I am not asking it as a personal favor, but as something that you owe to the ring. You are a great fight fan. I know that you and Mrs. Hazeltine never miss a good fight. Tim Bunce is the clean, modest kind of fighter that you want to see in the ring, and he is a fighter, not a lah-de-dah boxer. Will you help him out of this jam? I will do anything you say. You can see that I am very much in earnest about this."

"Yes," said Gillian, "I can see that."

He reached forward and pressed one of a row of pearl buttons at the side of his desk. The door presently opened and his secretary came in.

"A blond young man named Timothy Bunce is in the waiting room. Bring him in here."

His secretary looked at Gillian disapprovingly. He sometimes sidetracked important work when his sympathies were aroused. And she evidently suspected that he was up to his old tricks.

"Mr. Duncan is waiting to see you about that railroad fire matter," she said. "He says it is very urgent."

"Tell Mr. Duncan to drop in tomorrow," said Gillian.

His secretary frowned and hesitated. Her displeasure became more apparent. She looked at Paddy Tobin and her lips became thin.

She said coldly: "Very well, Mr. Hazeltine," and withdrew.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVISIBLE HAND.

BATTLING BUNCE was, as pugilists go, a good-looking youngster. He lacked the customary tokens of his profession, having neither cauliflower ears, a turnip nose, nor a bruised and swollen mouth. There were no scars visible upon his darkly tanned face, although Gillian observed an area about as large as a man's palm that had been shaved clean, at the back of his head. In the center of the shaved area was an "X" of adhesive tape holding down a wad of absorbent gauze.

His mouth was grimly closed. What particularly interested Gillian was the expression in his eyes. It was an expression of great perplexity.

The fighter's hands were in his pants pockets. He withdrew them when Paddy Tobin introduced him to Gillian. His handclasp, Gillian noted, was moist and cold and nervous. He was obviously nervous and ill at ease. Gillian knew how bashful some fighters were, once you got them out of the ring. He said calmly: "Sit down, Tim."

In an effort to put the young man at his ease, he added: "I have always secretly wished that fate had sent me into the ring instead of the court room. Many times I've regretted that I had not mastered the art of sending over a good right hook to the jaw. I would enjoy using it quite often on crooked

judges, lying witnesses, bulldozing district attorneys, and stupid juries. But I deal only in words—clever, soft, hard, brutal and even, on occasion, honest. But I'd swap all the words I know for that pair of mule hoofs you carry in each hand!"

Battling Bunce did not smile. He looked more nervous than ever. He sat very stiffly on the edge of his chair, with his large brown hands firmly clasping his knees, with his powerful chin drawn in, as a turtle draws in its head, and with that expression of puzzlement in his clear blue eyes.

Gillian leaned forward with the smile that had won many juries.

"Tim, Paddy has been telling me about the tough breaks you've been having. I want you to tell me what's happened to your punch. Put it in your own words. Why can't you punch?"

Battling Bunce cleared his throat. Little lines of pain appeared about his fine blue eyes.

He said huskily: "I don't know, Mr. Hazeltine. It's just got me. I don't know."

"Try to describe it to me."

Tim hesitated.

Paddy said: "He thinks it's childish, Mr. Hazeltine."

"I don't think it's anything," said the fighter, "that a lawyer can do anything about. I think it's just a waste of your valuable time."

"Supposing," Gillian humored him, "that you tell me, anyway."

Battling Bunce took a deep breath. The subject was obviously very painful to him.

"It's just as if somebody was holding my arm when I want to let a punch go." He looked at Gillian despairingly. Beads of sweat had appeared on his forehead. Gillian was amazed at the terrific effort it was taking Bunce to get the words out.

"Mr. Hazeltine, did you ever have one of these nightmares when you found yourself standing in the middle of a railroad track with an express train flying down the rails at you—and you couldn't move? Well," the young fellow panted, "that's what it's like. I get all set to land a punch. I time it—so. I put everything I have into it—so. But when I let the punch go, it doesn't travel. It's as if my arm was moving through molasses. Something holds it back."

Gillian said firmly: "That punch Mullin gave you yesterday must have tied up some nerve center."

But the prize fighter shook his head. "It happened before that. It happened during the middle of the week. It's just grown worse and worse."

"What we want to know," said Paddy anxiously, "is, where his punch has gone."

"WHAT," Gillian asked of Battling Bunce, "did Mullin whisper to you when you were sparring?"

"Insults!"

"About Kitty—and yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I should think that would have made you want to murder him."

"It did. But the harder I tried to hit, from then on, the softer my punch grew."

"Have you been boxing this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"What luck did you have?"

"None. Absolutely none! I was boxing Tiger Wales. I hit him with everything I had. He said it was like being pelted with feathers. He said to uncork. I tried to uncork. But that

thing—like a strong hand—was pulling me back. It seemed to be hanging onto my biceps, here." The blond pugilist handkerchiefed his forehead. Fresh sweat instantly stood out. "What am I going to do? Will you tell me? I'll do anything you tell me to do."

Gillian sank back and reached for a fresh cigar. He bit off the end and lighted it. He said:

"How do you feel about going in there with Kid Murphy to-night?"

"I could kill him if I was feeling right."

Paddy stared at him. "That's funny, Tim. I never heard you say a thing like that before. Did you hear him, Mr. Hazeltine? In all the time I've known him, that is the first time I ever heard him say a boasting word."

Battling Bunce lifted clenched fists from his knees.

"If I only could mean it!" he cried. "I don't believe it myself. I'm not sure of it. I'll tell you how I feel about meeting Kid Murphy to-night—I feel he is going to take me in less than two rounds!"

Gillian said gravely: "Tim, will it make you feel any better to know that I am going to take charge of all your troubles, and that I'm going to straighten everything out for you, and that somehow I am going to get Kitty back for you?"

The fighter was staring at him incredulously.

"Can you do all that?"

"If you knew Mr. Hazeltine the way I do," put in Paddy, "you would not ask a dumb question like that. Now—are you going in there tonight and lick hell out of Murphy?"

"I—I'm going to try."

Gillian nodded. "That's a little better. Now, Tim, you run along and wait for Paddy in the reception room. I want to have a few more minutes alone with him."

When the boy was gone, Paddy opened his hands, palms up, in a futile, questioning gesture and said: "Well, you see how things stack. What is your candid opinion?"

Gillian answered: "Part of the trouble is Mullin, another part is Kitty, but the large part is—over-modesty. He had it to begin with. Why did you hold him back? Because he was too modest. A fighter should not be so modest. None of the big fighters is really modest. Convincing themselves that they are good is part of the battle. Tim Bunce is not yet convinced. In spite of his fighting ability, he has never been convinced. The loss of Kitty was a terrific blow to his pride. Mullin's tactics constituted — the knockout blow. Too much modesty! Not enough egotism! Not enough swagger!"

"How," Paddy moaned, "can we give him back his pride?"

"That would not be enough," Gillian answered. "If he is ever to reach the top of the heap he must have pride that he never before possessed. How did he explain his knock-outs?"

"He thought most of them were flukes—lucky breaks." Paddy leaned forward and his expression was imploring. "Mr. Hazeltine, I knew you would dope out what the trouble was. Now—will you take charge of things?"

Gillian looked at him dreamily. "I have had strange cases and baffling cases laid on my doorstep, but I am sure that no one ever brought me a stranger, more baffling case than this. My specialty, Paddy, is murder cases. What does a murder lawyer know about finding a punch that a prize fighter has lost?"

"This case," said Paddy gloomily, "is closer to a murder than you may guess."

It was closer to a murder than even Paddy guessed—a murder that would provide Gillian Hazeltine with one of the most amazing cases he ever took into a court room.

CHAPTER IV.

RINGSIDE.

SOME rumors of the broken romance of Battling Bunce had crept into the tabloids, with the result that the auditorium that night was crowded to capacity. Paddy Tobin had, on departing, left two tickets for Gillian.

"These are front row ringside, Mr. Hazeltine, and they are right next to the seats that will be used by Mullin and Kitty. I want you to look her over, and, if you have a chance, talk to her. Also, you will have a chance to see Mullin at close range."

Gillian had given his beautiful red-headed young wife a limousine for her birthday. During the ride down to the auditorium, he told her the more pertinent of the facts in the strange and baffling case of Battling Bunce. Vee Hazeltine's comments were always pungent. She said:

"I had an idea that prize fighters' souls were made of equal parts of brass and rawhide. I think it's a fascinating situation. but I am not entirely sold on your modesty theory. To me, it's much more thrilling than that. In Battling Bunce, you have a primitive man who is not reacting primitively. A hairy caveman comes along and steals his woman. Battling Bunce, also a caveman, instead of chasing him with a club studded with the fang of a saber-toothed tiger, sits and mopes and broods. Battling Bunce lost his chance to be a caveman hero in the eyes of the dewy-eyed maiden. Will he get another chance?"

"That," said her husband, "is a neat idea. I am going to work on that. But it all goes back to over-modesty, doesn't it, Vee?"

"A woman married to a lawyer learns not to argue," stated the beautiful redhead simply.

The auditorium was almost filled when they were ushered up to their seats in the first row ringside. Vee Hazeltine loved a good fight. Her color was high to-night, and her emerald-green eyes seemed greener and livelier than usual.

"Will your caveman give Kid Murphy a fight?" she wanted to know.

Gillian was waving a salute of greeting to a telegraph operator he recognized at the long bench under their edge of the ring. He said absently: "I'm afraid not."

Voices babbled about them. Smoke from cigars and cigarettes rose in a dense blue cloud.

Vee suddenly pinched Gillian's arm.

"Darling, who is that Foxy Grandpa sitting over there—pink, bald head, fringe of snow-white hair, sunburned or alcoholic nose, naughty blue eyes?"

Gillian looked. "That is Finister Chardon, the reformer."

"The one who's always in the papers?"

"Yes"—curtly. Gillian detested Finister Chardon. He was the vice president of the Greenfield National and, according to Gillian's information, a hypocrite of the first order. "His latest whiter-than-snow campaign is being launched against the brutal sport of box-fighting. Fighting is sinful! It should be banned! Ah,

but note the greedy glow in his eyes. If I told you what I know about his private life, Vee, even you would blush."

"You might give my blushing machinery a test, Gill."

But Gillian was too busy nodding and waving to acquaintances.

THE radio announcer, testing his microphone, grinned at Gillian, jabbed a thumb at the ring, and, with the thumb and forefinger of his other hand, gently pinched his nose. This was sign language, meaning that he expected to spend a very dull evening.

Then Josh Hammersley, of the Greenfield *Times,* sauntered up and hailed the criminal lawyer with a gladsome shout.

"What a pair of optimists you two are! Well, it all goes to flatter the power of the press. Everybody is here to-night to see the boy who had his sweetie brutally stolen from him by Champion Jake Mullin. Jake's coming, I hear."

Josh bent down and spoke in low tones into Gillian's always receptive ear.

"How are you betting on the Mullin-Walsh fight?"

"I am putting my money in municipal bonds," Gillian answered, "bursting with civic pride, as you know I am."

"It's one of these things," said Josh. "Mullin, if you want the low-down, is putting his own money on—Walsh. At three to one. He is going to lose to Walsh on a foul. There will be the usual hullabaloo—and a return match. But don't bet on that fight, Gill. What do you think of to-night's card? I hear Battling Bunce is a flash in the pan, a washout, gone absolutely stale. You will see Kid Murphy left-hand him to ribbons."

Men were moving about the ring. The announcer, in a high falsetto imitation of the inimitable Joe Humphreys, was intoning the names of the participants in the first preliminary, a four-rounder. Lightweights. Judge's decision. "In this cawna-a-ah, Billy Lewis—"

The bell presently rang. Two slim, nervous young men stopped stretching the ropes in their respective corners and came rushing out to meet in the middle of the ring in a fury of flashing gloves, of leather thudding on flesh.

The end came fifteen seconds after the bell, with the crowd on its feet roaring. Billy Lewis, exposing his chin a fraction of a second too long, went down under a left hook and stayed down.

It was the beginning of an evening of knock-outs. Two welterweights, in the second bout, kept the crowd on its feet for two rounds. Then one of the fighters went down for a count of eight, down again for a count of seven, and down, finally, for the full count.

Said Gillian to Vee: "If this keeps up, Battling Bunce may catch the spirit."

The third preliminary was stopped at the urgent request of the crowd at the beginning of the fourth round, because one of the contestants was bleeding so badly at the nose and mouth.

IMMEDIATELY after the six-round semifinal, a measure of excitement was provided for everybody by the triumphal entry of Jake Mullin.

Gillian heard him coming a long way off. His approach was comparable to the coming of a Roman emperor, dragging his captives behind his

victorious chariot. At the far end of the aisle, voices began to hum. The sound grew louder and louder until it became a roar.

People stood up. Some climbed on their seats for a better view of the light heavyweight champion. The announcer, giving the items of next Saturday night's card, was ignored. Everybody was trying to see the champion. There were many boos. There were numerous hisses. There was a sprinkling of the curious birdlike sound known as "the berry." But these manifestations of the public's distaste for Jake Mullin were drowned by the prolonged roar: Hail, hail—the champion!

A police sergeant came and stood importantly beside Gillian. How the cops did love these pugs! Then, as the roar rose to full volume, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a beef-red face marked with old smallpox scars came into view, followed by a slender girl in a dark blue suit with a dark blue hat to match.

Jake Mullin, and Kitty Kelly that was—the star performers in the tragic drama of Battling Bunce!

Gillian looked quickly at the girl. She was pale and wan and woebegone. Her pale face was a mask. Her eyes were dull and lifeless. She looked forlorn. Without the explanation that Paddy Tobin had given him, Gillian would have known that here was a girl whose spirit was broken.

But there was nothing forlorn about her husband. With his hard, vain grin, he was looking about him, seeming to sop up flattery and homage as a sponge sops up water. He wore a striking tan suit, a maroon vest, and a bright green tie—grass green.

As his vain and arrogant eyes swept about, they chanced to encounter the upturned sparkling green eyes of Mrs. Gillian Hazeltine.

The champion's grin became twisted; a smirk. It was evidently his lady-killer's smile. In the glare from the lights above the ring, Vee's face, with its bright red hair, its lovely mouth, stood out, as a beautiful face will always stand out. The champion's lower lip sagged moistly. He ran the tip of his tongue along it and said:

"Why, hullo, there, little sweetheart!"

Gillian looked from Mullin to Vee, and saw that she was meant. For a moment the famous criminal lawyer was too astounded to do anything.

"Darling," Vee said quickly, in a low voice, "please ignore him."

Upon Gillian's judicial brow a cold film of sweat formed. He went white, and his lips went gray. And in that moment was born Gillian's personal and private dislike of Champion Jake Mullin.

JOSH HAMMERSLEY provided a timely diversion. The reporter was chuckling.

"Gill," he said, "I've just heard something mighty funny. Did you know that Finister Chardon is here tonight getting local color for a red-hot interview he is going to give the boys on the evils of prize fighting?"

Gillian, still pale, nodded. "I understand that Chardon claims prize fighting is a revolting, degrading sport, and that America has a blood lust equal only to that of the old Roman mob who watched Christians served to lions. Well, Josh?"

"Well," said the reporter, "you are one of the foremost defenders of the sport, aren't you? As one of our eminent citizens, why don't you let me quote your views on the subject?"

"Not to-night," said Gillian. "I am beginning to wonder if the sport is as clean and wholesome as it's cracked up to be. I mean, judging by some of the men who are in it."

Jake Mullin was meant to overhear that, and he did. He reached up quickly and seized the reporter's wrist in fingers of iron.

"Introduce me to your swell friends, Josh."

Josh glanced at him coldly. He performed the rites with obvious reluctance. Kitty Kelly Mullin did not meet Gillian's eyes. She acknowledged the introduction with a faint nod and looked away again. Gillian did not put out his hand to Mullin. He, too, nodded faintly, but his steel-blue eyes bored into the insolent, derisive eyes of the light heavyweight champion. Mullin grinned.

"So you're Hazeltine, the crooked criminal lawyer."

"That," said Gillian, "happens to be a lie."

"And a dumb remark," put in Josh. "Good Lord, Mullin, won't you ever get any brains? Don't you realize that Mr. Hazeltine is one of the most powerful men in this city? If you had the sense of a jellyfish—"

"I got sense enough!" the champion snapped.

Josh said angrily: "Well, demonstrate it! Since you took the title away from Walker, you think you own the earth. You're so swell-headed that you don't know danger when the red light flashes in your eyes."

"Oh, ye-a-ah?" drawled the champion. "And, say, just where is the danger?"

"Never mind him," Gillian snapped, and turned to his wife: "Vee, I'm awfully sorry that you have to be present—"

Vee smiled. "Don't be sorry, darling. I love fights."

"I'm saying," persisted the reporter hotly, "that if you'll take the trouble to ask some of your racketeer friends, you'll learn that Mr. Hazeltine is a dangerous man to have for an enemy. You need a keeper, Mullin, that's what you need!"

The champion was grinning scornfully at Gillian.

"Well, let's see him get dangerous. I know he's crooked, but I want to see him act dangerous. I can act dangerous, too. Stuff that in your pipe, you two saps. I'm Jake Mullin, the light heavyweight champion of the world. Get that? I ain't afraid of any man living, and that takes in all the lawyers and ham reporters here and everywhere. And don't give me any more of your lip, H a m m e r s l e y, or I'll slap you down where you belong, see?"

With that the champion turned his broad back on Josh and the Hazeltines. Vee laid a restraining hand on Gillian's arm.

"Darling, count one hundred!"

He smiled. "I'm not sore. I'm just thinking."

Said Vee: "There ought to be a law against men like him."

"There are none on the books," said Gillian. "But I am going to make some. And I am going to execute them."

The champion, in his loud voice, was talking again, this time to his woebegone wife.

"After we see what Kid Murphy does to that palooka of yours, we're goin' to do some steppin'. We're goin' to a night club—the Black Cat—to have a good time."

Gillian continued to think. He knew the proprietor of the Black Cat. It was

the noisiest most expensive night club in Greenfield.

GILLIAN heard the radio announcer say:

"Well, friends, the decks are now being cleared for the main bout. The contestants have not yet appeared, but the crowd is stirring with excitement. There are rumors that Battling Bunce has lost his wallop. Well, we'll see."

There were murmurs in the back of the auditorium. A lean, black-haired young man in a purple satin bathrobe came down the aisle surrounded by handlers. He climbed up and ducked through the ropes. There was faint cheering. It persisted as a man came down another aisle, a blond young man in a blue flannel bathrobe. Behind him, pale and worried, came Paddy Tobin and two men in shirt sleeves.

"There," said Gillian, "is the boy who lost his punch."

The referee was bending over the ropes, beckoning to Jake Mullin.

The radio announcer was saying: "The two contestants in the star bout of the evening are in the ring now, folks. Can you hear me above the roaring? The crowd isn't roaring for Murphy or Bunce. It's roaring for the light heavyweight champion, Jake Mullin. He's been asked up into the ring. One of these boys—Bunce—has been Mullin's sparring partner. The winner of to-night's bout may meet Mullin some time in the not distant future.

"Can you hear me above the yelling? The champion is being introduced to the crowd. Now he's clasping his hands above his head and making little ducking bows, in the immemorial manner. The two boys are still in their bathrobes. Murphy looks good, folks. He looks mighty good. His condition looks excellent. But Bunce looks dazed. There's a queer look in his eyes. Something is certainly the matter with Bunce.

"Mullin is climbing out of the ring now, folks. He shook hands with Murphy, and it looked as if he was wishing him luck. But he absolutely ignored Battling Bunce. There must be something in these rumors that are going around that there was some unpleasantness between the two men at the training camp. Hey, Jake! Hey—*Jake!* Won't you say a few words to the radio audience?"

Mullin had climbed down and was grasping the mike.

"Good evenin', folks. This is Jake Mullin, the light heavyweight champion. I dropped in here to-night to look over the boys in the star bout. If I was betting I'd put my money on Kid Murphy. I just want to say to you folks that you can count on me to give all my friends a good showing on the Fourth of July. I am in the pink of condition. I expect to take Frankie Walsh in one round."

The radio announcer recaptured the microphone and said, ironically: "I'll hire some violets to do the blushing for you, Jake." And into the microphone:

"Well, friends, there's a lot of tension around here now. You could cut it with a knife. The two boys have taken off their bathrobes. They have brand-new gloves on. The referee has told them to give us a good fight and to break clean and so forth. They are in their corners waiting for the bell. Battling Bunce is right above me. Physically, he looks perfect, but he still acts strange. Kid Murphy is on his tiptoes, nervous as a cat, as he always is before a fight starts. They are quite a contrast. The Battler is a

blond, sunburned to the color of an old saddle, and he has as beautiful a pair of shoulders as you ever saw. Kid Murphy is a brunette. You might almost call him a hot-house brunette. He has black hair, black or dark brown eyes, and his skin is as white as a gardenia. He has square shoulders. His build is bony. The crowd is buzzing with anticipation and—"

Clang!

AS the bell rang, Gillian distinctly heard Paddy Tobin say to Battling Bunce:

"Watch out for that left. Tie him up. Get under it and go after his stomach. Pound it pink, then work on his jaw."

"With what?" grunted Jake Mullin loudly.

Battling Bunce pushed himself away from the ropes with an air of resignation. His subsequent actions were those of an automaton. Kid Murphy came springily out from his corner, with his famous left extended, his right dancing up and down under his chin, ready to dart in like a snake or to block blows to his notoriously delicate midsection. One sport writer had said of Kid Murphy: "The Kid has an iron jaw—but a custard stomach. His Achilles heel is down where the vest begins."

The two men met approximately in ring center to exchange a volley of unimportant punches. They fell into a clinch, which the referee broke by walking between them. Battling Bunce launched a right to the midsection, which Murphy blocked. And Bunce blocked with his elbow a left jab to the head. They clinched again, and again the referee interfered.

Murphy began to lead, and Bunce to fall back. It was soon evident that Murphy was carrying the fight. Bunce backed off and backed off. The crowd began to hoot. Some one jeered: "Get in there and fight, you big slob!" Some one else made the usual sarcastic reference to roller skates.

Gillian knew that Battling Bunce was trying. His shoulders and face were already agleam with sweat. He was trying, but that invisible force was holding back his punches.

The round ended decisively in Kid Murphy's favor. Paddy Tobin threw a bucketful of cold water into Battling Bunce's face, and Gillian heard him exhorting him:

"What did I tell you, Tim? He hasn't a thing but that left. Go in there this round and take him. Open up, will you?"

"Sure, sure," said Bunce, "I'll open up. I'll take him this round."

"He's as bad," pronounced Vee, "as either of those lightweights in that first preliminary."

"Worse, sweetie; much worse," said Jake Mullin. And Gillian breathed hard. Something was going to happen to Jake Mullin. Gillian was not yet certain what it would be, but it would be—sufficient.

When the bell rang for the second round, Battling Bunce leaped out as though he really meant business. Kid Murphy met him with that left of his straight out. Bunce brought his glove slashing down on the triceps; the arm gave way.

It happened in a space of time measurable only by a split-second watch. Kid Murphy slipped on a wet spot on the canvas. To balance himself he threw his right arm wildly backward. For at least three seconds his stomach was utterly unprotected. Bunce closed in. He drove one fist and then the other into that ready target:

And nothing happened! The crowd was roaring. Having had their appetite for knock-outs well whetted, they wanted another one.

"Finish it up!"

"Kill him, Battler!"

"Chop him down!"

But Kid Murphy had not even staggered. A grin flitted over his lips. He knew that the rumors he had been hearing were true. Battling Bunce had entered the ring without his famous punch! Battling Bunce had had his chance to send over two knock-out punches. He had tried—and failed.

KID MURPHY'S defense became noticeably careless as he tried for a knock-out. Gillian saw the sweat, a shining layer of it, rolling down Bunce's magnificent body. The boy was trying. For a long time Gillian wondered what it was that Bunce reminded him of. And suddenly he realized: a slow motion picture. He moved as if he were handicapped by some medium much thicker than air. Bunce himself had compared it to molasses. He was clumsy and slow.

Once Kid Murphy dropped his guard and beckoned with his gloves. The gesture said: "Come on and hit me. I dare you to hit me!" He left himself wide open, and Bunce tried to hit him, but could not.

"How," Gillian moaned, "can I convince a fighter who has lost his punch that he has one of the greatest punches in ring history?"

And Vee said grimly: "You must do something for that boy, Gill. It's tragic—simply tragic."

Gillian heard Mullin say to Kitty with a chuckle: "Well, baby, what do you think of your hee-ro now? So that is the beautiful boy you were betting your sugar on, is it?"

And Kitty Kelly answered him in a fierce little voice:

"I'm still betting on him!"

Gillian looked at her as the bell rang for the third round. He had reached the conclusion that there was only one way to help Battling Bunce. He must make him angry. And to make him angry, he must secure some information from Kitty Kelly.

Battling Bunce looked tired. He came heavily off his stool. He seemed to stagger a little as he went out to meet his opponent. Kid Murphy rushed out and drove him into a corner. With a right hook to the jaw, he spun Bunce around. Then he let drive with his left at the back of Bunce's head.

A sympathetic pang throbbed for a moment in the back of Gillian's head. He was certain that that blow had landed on the "X" of adhesive tape. But it was not a rabbit punch. It was legal.

Bunce went down under it. His legs collapsed. He fell on his left side and rolled over limply on his back, with one glove thrown over his face.

It had happened so quickly that the crowd was unprepared. But the crowd was on its feet now, baying.

Kid Murphy retired to the farthest corner, draped his arms along the ropes and tried to look nonchalant. He could not repress a grin. He had never expected to win this fight. The best he had hoped for was a draw.

The referee's hand rose and fell over Battling Bunce. The fighter's face, partly visible under the protecting glove, was turned toward Gillian. The boy's eyes were partly open. He was looking at Kitty Kelly. His mouth was working. He was, Gillian was certain, conscious. Gillian swallowed uncomfortably.

Paddy crawled through the ropes and helped Tim Bunce to his feet. The fighter walked unsteadily across the ring and congratulated his victor.

Jake Mullin sprang up and made his way through the crowd to Kid Murphy's corner. And thus the opportunity was given to Gillian for a word with Kitty Kelly.

He said rapidly: "Mrs. Mullin, I am trying to find some way of helping Tim Bunce. I need your help."

She gazed at him levelly.

"Paddy told me Tim was going to you. How can I help?"

And Gillian said: "I want to get Tim mad. I want to get him fighting mad. Is there any way?"

"There might be, Mr. Hazeltine. But I don't know. He seems to have lost all heart... You might call him dishonest. Call him a crook. Very few people know it, but Tim's father died in the penitentiary. Tim insists that his father was framed on a burglary charge. Whether that is true or not, Tim has always been terribly touchy on the subject of honesty."

"I'll try it," said Gillian.

She touched his arm. "I'll do anything you ask, to help Tim get straightened out again. I—I failed him." Her eyes filled with tears.

Gillian turned a gentle smile on Vee and said: "Darling, I am going to park you for a few minutes in the car. I have something to say to Bunce."

CHAPTER V.

THE BEST-LAID PLANS—

WHEN Gillian entered the dressing room, Battling Bunce was stretched out on the rubbing table. To Paddy Tobin, Gillian whispered:

"No matter what I say to Tim, back me up. Understand? There's no time now for explanations."

Paddy nodded. And Gillian said, in an explosive voice: "Bunce, why did you throw that fight to-night?"

The fighter turned his head and looked at him with amazement.

"That story of your lost punch," Gillian angrily went on, "was so clever that it fooled me. And I'm an expert in dealing with liars!"

Battling Bunce sat up and swung his legs over the side of the table. He stared at Gillian. Huskily he said:

"What are you saying, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"I'm saying," Gillian rapped out, "that that fight was fixed. You sold out to Murphy. You didn't lose your punch; you sold it!"

"That's a damned lie! Who said I sold out?"

"Bluffing again!" Gillian jeered. "I told you this morning I won't help any man who won't come clean with me. You lied to me."

"Is that so, Mr. Hazeltine?" Paddy gasped.

"You bet it's so! This fine two-fisted fighter of yours has been double-crossing you. He's been lying to both of us."

Tim repeated: "That's a damned lie and you know it!"

"Listen to him!" Gillian snapped. "All I have to say is that any man who sells out as you did deserves to lose his girl!"

Tim was flexing and unflexing his taped hands. His great chest was rising and falling with the labor of his indignation.

"Look here!" he panted. "Maybe I put on a lousy show in there to-night, but I'm not crooked. I didn't lie. I didn't sell out. If you call me

a crook again I'm going to knock you down." His face was flushed and his eyes were blazing. Gillian wanted to cheer, but he said:

"You're as crooked as your father was. You would knock me down, would you? Why don't you knock down the man who put the label on you? You don't dare knock him down!"

"I'd knock Gene Tunney down for calling me crooked! I'd knock Jack Dempsey down for calling me crooked! I never threw a fight in my life. You can call me anything you want, and maybe it's true, but no man alive is going to call me a crook! Ask Paddy!"

Paddy arose promptly to the occasion. He did not know where this amazing conversation was leading. But he trusted Gillian.

"How do I know you're on the up-and-up?" he growled. "Maybe you did sell out to Kid Murphy to-night. How do I know?"

"You're a pair of skunks!" Battling Bunce raged. He looked dangerous. Gillian began to wonder how much further this taunting might go, if he had any regard for his personal safety. The trick had worked. The problem now was to keep Battling Bunce mad long enough for the important mission Gillian had in mind to be executed.

"No wonder your Kitty is ashamed and disgusted! All her faith in you is gone. She was for you up to the moment she learned that you had sold out."

THE Battler roared: "Who said I sold out? Tell me that! Tell me who said I sold out to Murphy!"

"Jake Mullin," said Gillian.

"He did, did he?"

"I heard him telling that to a lot of people. He said all this talk of your losing your punch was so much boloney. He said he could produce several witnesses to prove you had lain down to Murphy for a thousand dollars."

"He's a damned liar!"

"Yes?" drawled Gillian. "Why don't you tell him so? You're so anxious to knock somebody down. Knock him down. You don't dare knock him down! You don't dare to call him a liar to his face, and knock him down!"

"I don't, don't I?"

"No, you don't," Paddy sneered. "It's just as I thought. Nothin' but a pack of lies. You dirty little crook, you! After all I've done for you—selling out right under my nose! Believe me, Bunce, I'm washed up with you."

"I'll show you," the fighter panted, "and I'll show Mullin whether I'm crooked or not. Where is he?"

"Is this more embroidery?" Gillian asked of Paddy.

"Where is he?" Bunce roared. "I'll show you whether it's embroidery!"

"You mean," Gillian marveled, "you'll walk up to Mullin and hit him right in the jaw with everything you've got?"

"All I ask is, where is he?"

"Will you hit him as you've never hit any man before?"

"I sure will!"

"What with?" Paddy snorted.

"This!" shouted Battling Bunce, and he lifted his huge taped right fist to a level with Gillian's nose.

"I think you're bluffing," said Gillian.

"So do I," said Paddy. "I think all you want is the chance to get out of here and hide your face with shame!"

"Where is Mullin?" the fighter demanded.

"At the Black Cat," said Gillian. "It's a night club. It's in the middle of the block on Maplewood, between—"

"I know where it is. Where are my clothes?"

"Here," said Paddy. "And let me tell you something, big boy. If you don't knock Mullin cock-eyed, we'll know you're a crook."

"Leave that to me," said Tim grimly. He was already hurrying into his clothes. When he was gone, Paddy said to Gillian:

"I wish you'd had that idea before the fight, Mr. Hazeltine. What good do you figure it will do now?"

"If he knocks Mullin down, it will prove to him that he still has his punch, won't it?"

"Yes, sir; but by to-morrow morning he will say what he always says—it was nothing but an accident. That blamed modesty will be riding him again. How are you going to get around that?"

"Let to-morrow morning," Gillian answered, "take care of that. You have retained me to convince Tim Bunce that he has one of the most terrific punches ever seen in a ring. With my own peculiar methods, I will convince him."

"But suppose something goes wrong, Mr. Hazeltine? Suppose Tim cools off and loses his punch again before he finds Mullin! Suppose Mullin, if Tim does find him, beats him to the punch? Suppose waiters or bouncers or friends of Mullin break up the argument before Tim has a chance to hit Mullin? Worst of all, suppose Tim is pinched for disorderly conduct?"

"I was just coming to that," said the lawyer. "Part of my plan is that Tim must be arrested and booked for felonious assault, or at least disorderly conduct. That, in fact, is your job. You are to follow Tim to the Black Cat. You are to pick up a cop you do not know on the way. Tell him that Jake Mullin is going to be feloniously assaulted by Tim Bunce. If the policeman hesitates, remind him that here is an excellent chance to grab off some publicity. Cops love publicity. Tim has undoubtedly taken a taxi. Follow him in one. Pick up the cop. When Bunce is locked up, telephone me at my house. Say nothing to reporters. As Tim's attorney, I will do all the talking."

Paddy Tobin reached for his hat and hurried out.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

U. S. Post Office in Hollow Tree

OF all the trees in America, only one ever had the distinction of being designated as a United States post office. The unique tree, a huge cedar, is in Clallam county, Washington. In the early days, the tree being conveniently located where several roads met, ingenious natives hollowed it out with fire, arranged boxes inside, and requested that mail for the district be distributed from there. Uncle Sam was willing, and so for more than a year the tree was an official post office. *Vincent B. Wilson.*

The Mysterious John Solomon

Paris is a place of mystery for any one; but for Dick North, a drifting civil engineer, it suddenly became an Arabian Nights fantasy when that weird cockney wizard John Solomon snatched him into an intrigue of empires

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Cyrano," "John Solomon—Supercargo," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

PARISIAN PLOTTERS.

UPON a bright April day in Paris a young man came down the steps opposite the Rue de Castiglione and entered the Tuileries gardens. It was a warm and sunny morning. Children played in the gardens, people were everywhere enjoying the flowers and fresh air. The young man strolled along until he found a bench occupied by only one other person, and sat down.

One might look twice at him. As he took off his hat and lighted a ciga-

EDITOR'S NOTE: It is ten years since John Solomon, one of the most popular of fiction characters, has made his appearance in any magazine. We have urged Mr. Bedford-Jones to give us more of John, but he was unable to do so, being out of touch with the famous little cockney—not knowing, indeed, whether Solomon were still alive or not.

While in Rome last year, Mr. Bedford-Jones was one day leaving the Chigi Palace when, under the deep arch to the left of the entrance, he sighted the unmistakable figure of the cockney. Next moment Solomon had disappeared. He could not be located; every one denied all knowledge of him, and Mr. Bedford-Jones was forced to leave Italy without finding his man. A month later, while *en route* to Africa, he was approached by a stranger and handed a note in the neat calligraphy of John Solomon. A meeting followed, and from this chance we are enabled to introduce our readers to what Mr. Bedford-Jones terms the strangest and most remarkable of all the adventures of that strange man, John Solomon.

"This does not concern us. The man intended to murder you. Come"

rette his face was striking—bronzed from the eyes down, but white of forehead, sure mark of weeks under a torrid sun and a sun-helmet lately worn. His features were rather harsh, forbidding, almost bitter, as though life had used him most unkindly. His eyes were remarkable. When Dick North looked at any one—as he looked at the other man on the bench—his cold gray eyes were half asleep, they held no animation, they seemed queerly devoid of life. When he smiled, this changed all at once—but there it was. The look of a stricken man.

"Werry fine day, sir, ain't it? Werry fine," said the other occupant of the bench.

In some surprise North surveyed the speaker. He saw a pudgy little man whittling tobacco from a plug into an old clay pipe; a rather small man, none too well dressed, wearing a Basque béret over one ear, with wisps of gray hair escaping from about the edge. Wide blue eyes turned upon North with no more expression than the eyes of a china doll.

"Fine day for fine folks," said North, with a curt laugh. "You're an Englishman?"

"No, sir; American," said the other apologetically. "Naturalized citizen, sir. By the way, I'd take it werry kindly if so be as you'd tell me why you give up a building of that 'ere reclamation project down in Libya."

"Eh? What's that?" North's eyes came wide awake. He was startled. "You know me?"

The blue eyes twinkled at him in a most astonishingly friendly fashion.

"Well, sir, them as asks questions get less 'n they asks, says I," came the

reply. "But questions is all werry good in their place, as the old gent said when the 'ousemaid asks if 'e was minded to marry 'er. About that 'ere reclamation project, Mr. North—"

"Who are you?" demanded North. "I never met you in my life!"

THE pudgy little man chuckled, held a match to his clay pipe, and chuckled again.

"More questions, dang it!" he observed mildly to the world at large. "I gives 'im a 'int, and 'e goes and does it again! Why, Mr. North, it might be I could put you in the way o' making a couple o' thousand pounds, so to speak. Maybe more."

North's gaze swept the speaker. "You don't look it," he said. "Whoever you are, I don't know you. As for ten thousand dollars—huh! Can't be done in Paris without a thousand or two to start with. And I haven't a thousand francs to my name."

"This 'ere is an age of miracles, sir," said the other humbly. "Yes, sir, just like that! And Paris is a mortal queer place, Mr. North."

"How d'you know my name?" North regarded the smaller man curiously. "How do you know so confounded much about me? Suppose you tell me that for a starter."

The other chuckled wheezily. "I've been inwestigatin' of you, as the old gent said when 'e went and 'ired the pretty 'ousekeeper. Now, then, about that 'ere reclamation project and you leaving of it 'alf done—?"

"I didn't leave it; I was fired," said North, and laughed shortly. "Since you know so much about me, you ought to know that. An investigating committee from Rome found graft everywhere; the cement was actually crumbling in the foundations of the dam. They wired Mussolini. I was kicked out of Africa inside two days, and lucky at that. If I hadn't been an American, they'd have jailed me."

"Werry likely, too," said the other, and his blue eyes were as deep and expressionless as the sky above. "And who might be the grafting parties, sir, in your own mind?"

"Probably one of my Italian assistants," said North, and shrugged. "How could I tell? They didn't give me a chance to look into it."

"Well, sir," said the other wheezily, "if I was you I'd go to 13 *bis*, Rue Montorgeuil, about eight o'clock to-night, and ask for Mr. Solomon. If so be as I ain't mistook, 'e can tell you about that 'ere two thousand quid, and also about your reputation."

"My reputation?" North flushed. "I haven't any. I'm wrecked, ruined, done for as an engineer! My reputation is buried in Libya. They wouldn't even grant me a trial!"

The innocent, childlike blue eyes of the other man dwelt upon him briefly, then the pudgy little stranger rose.

"This 'ere Solomon might be able to 'elp you, sir," he said deferentially. "You go to that 'ere address to-night, just like that! About eight."

With a nod the speaker started away. North checked him.

"Here, hold on! You haven't said who the devil you were, or—"

The other turned. "All in good time, sir. If I was you, I'd be werry slow about that 'ere deal with them American promoters. A man is mortal apt to be deceived in 'is fellows, as the old gent said when 'e found the butler a kissing of the 'ousemaid."

The little old man, walking rather stiffly, moved away, leaving North absolutely petrified with amazement.

He had been startled enough when

this queer little man spoke his name, asked about his disgrace; but how on earth could the fellow know about this new deal? It was a dead secret. Harden and Billings had sworn him to silence —had not told even North the details. They had merely discussed a prospective job; and here this man knew all about it! The thing was astounding.

Impulsively North started to follow the man, then found him gone, lost in the passing throngs. He sank back on his seat and groped for a fresh cigarette as he tried to get a grip on himself. Dingy little rascal with the blue eyes—some tout, some hanger-on of hotels?

A grimace swept North's face—a grimace of hopelessness, of rebellion against futility. A month previously he had been working on a huge reclamation project in Libya, engaged by the Italian government, his future brilliant.

Overnight he was utterly wrecked. A committee from Rome had uncovered graft, undeniable graft. He had been clapped under arrest, and promptly deported from Italian territory, a ruined man. His appeals, his demands for trial, for further investigation, were vain. He came to Paris disgraced, penniless, his career ended.

He started suddenly. What had the man said—Solomon might help him? Nonsense. Who was that man, to effect anything with the dictator of Italy? A bitter laugh twisted North's lips.

"The fellow was drunk. Yet he certainly knew me. . . . Well, I don't know what to think. I'm up against it. Why did he warn me against Harden and Billings?"

Bewildered, he left the bench, ascended to the Rue de Rivoli, and hailed a taxicab. He went directly to the American consulate and sent in his card to the official who was handling his case in Rome. He was ushered in at once.

"MY dear Mr. North," said the consular officer, "I've no news, and, frankly, I expect to have none. Our embassy at Rome, under the circumstances, is helpless to obtain any fair hearing for you. You know, the Fascisti believe in ruthless efficiency—"

"Oh, I know," said North. "By the way, do you people happen to know anything about a man named Solomon, in the Rue Montorgeuil?"

To his surprise, the official stared at him hard for a moment.

"Sorry," came the slow reply. "I cannot give you any information about him."

"So you know him, eh?" North shrugged. "What's the answer? Is he crooked or not?"

The other smiled slightly.

"Let me ask whether you know him, Mr. North?"

"Well," said North, "I have an appointment with him for this evening."

He received a swift, almost startled look.

"Then let me congratulate you," came the reply. "Rumor says he is one of the most powerful men in Europe. I can give you no information about him, except to say that he is thoroughly reliable."

North departed, feeling rather dazed. The most powerful man in Europe? That was putting it too strong. Rumor said the most powerful man in Europe was a Greek financier, Sir Basil Condax, whose money was unlimited and whose finger was in every diplomatic pie. This man Solomon probably had a pull somewhere, that was all.

North walked to the Hotel Continental, having an appointment there for luncheon with Billings. Last night, he had looked on the tentative offer from Harden and Billings as a providential helping hand; now, oddly enough, he was inclined to be critical.

Dick North was not effeminate, and he was not sentimental. He had worked his way up in a rough school; he had been on engineering jobs in Bolivia, in Canada, in the Mojave and, last of all, on his own hook in Libya. His first independent job had wrecked his life, but it had not wrecked him by a long shot. He was ready to fight, and to go the limit—if only he were not up against a stone wall!

North came to the Continental, turned in beneath the arch, and made his way direct to the suite occupied by Harden and Billings. He found Billings dictating in fluent French to a stenographer, and the promoter shook hands cordially.

"Harden will be in presently," said Billings. "Sit down—I'll have this letter cleaned up before he comes."

Billings was a stocky, powerful man of forty-odd, with grayish-red mustache, tight lips, a coldly keen eye. He had come to France on some wartime commission and had remained ever since, as an attorney and man of affairs, preferring it to petty politics at home. Harden had not been here so long, but was of New Orleans French descent, and so found France agreeable.

The door of the adjoining room opened, and Harden ushered out two men. North was somewhat surprised to find them Italians and, from their dress and manners, evidently men of position. Then Harden was warmly shaking his hand, having bowed out the swarthy pair.

"Be right with you. I'm leaving Paris to-night and a bit rushed. Ready, Billings?"

Harden was a lean, bronzed, outdoor man with an air of extreme optimism and aggressive self-confidence; he always spoke very positively. He had a large nose, thin-slitted dark eyes, and the cut of his jaw might be described at will as either strong and manly, or very brutal. North knew that until lately Harden had been selling agricultural machinery among the huge farms of Algeria and Morocco.

The three went out together, finding a quiet, old-time Gallic restaurant behind the Louvre department store. Not until they were settled at a comfortable corner table, with the *plat du jour* and a good wine ordered, was business touched upon. Then Harden rubbed his sinewy brown hand and smiled across the table, at North.

"Well, old man, prepared to close with us to-day?"

"No," said North, who was usually given to blunt speech.

"Eh?" For an instant the eyes of Harden narrowed and flashed. "How come?"

"I can't give you a definite answer before to-morrow," said North. "I'd like to know more about your project. Also, I must see a friend of mine to-night in regard to my own business in Rome. I want to get some action there if possible."

HARDEN nodded a little angrily. Billings, the usual spokesman for the pair, intervened with his urbane manner.

"North, I'll tell you confidentially that our project is close to Tunis."

"Tunis? In Africa?" said North.

"No, in France." Billings chuckled. "Algiers, remember, is a definite part

of France and not a colony. However, we can't tell you more until we have your answer. If you want references as to our responsibility, that's natural enough. But as to telling you any details—"

"Nonsense!" plunged in Harden aggressively. "We can trust North—in confidence."

"Entirely," said the surprised North, as the other glanced at him inquiringly.

"Good." Harden nodded. "We're acting for certain Italian gentlemen who are securing a concession from the French government for a large irrigation project on the Tunis-Algiers border. There you are, in brief. I suggest that, if you like to look us up, you might see Signor Dominetti. So think it over."

North nodded. Dominetti was an Italian exile, a nobleman who moved in high social circles in Paris. And this bit of information gave a little light on the situation.

France was feverishly worried, in true Gallic fashion, about the large Italian population of Tunis, having the idea that she would lose her Tunisian colony overnight whenever Mussolini issued a call to arms—an absurd idea, but deeply rooted. France did not love the glorious united strength of the new Italy. And Tunis, being more Italian than French, worried her vastly.

The waiter arrived. When he had departed, Billings tasted his wine and caressed his red-gray mustache.

"Don't mind saying," he observed, "that we've interested Dominetti in your case, North. Shouldn't be a bit surprised if we effected something at Rome for you. This is on the q. t."

"Mighty good of you," murmured North dutifully. And from this instant, he began to suspect.

He had asked no help from Harden or Billings. If they were tied up with the Royalist group of Italians, they certainly had no influence in Rome. North was far too well versed in the varied phases of the situation to swallow any such chaff.

The luncheon proceeded to an amiable conclusion. It was agreed that North would give his definite answer on the morrow, and the two partners professed themselves content; but North doubted that. He caught occasional glances between them, hinting at some hidden meaning. He was puzzled by their eagerness, their warm friendliness, their confidence that he would take the job. Neither of them was a philanthropist, but their talk was entirely of his own welfare.

"Well, good luck all around!" said Harden, shaking hands at parting. "Not going our way? All right—I'm confident of your decision. And if you need any salary advance, just tip us the word. *Au revoir!*"

They departed by taxi. North walked over to the river and strolled along the Seine, thinking hard and getting nowhere. Something about it all worried him, puzzled him, warned him in a subconscious way, though he could lay his finger on nothing definite.

"And who was it knocked me out, down in Libya?" he pondered, not for the first time. "One of those Italian engineers, that's sure! At a venture, I'd say it was that assistant of mine, Caporni—he's a scoundrel if there ever was one! Yet I haven't a particle of evidence. On the face of it, Dick North was guilty as hell. While I don't blame Mussolini for kicking me out, I do blame him for not giving me a decent chance to clear myself."

At eight that night, North came to the address given him by the pudgy

little man, in the ancient street almost overshadowed by Notre Dame—the old, mysterious, ghost-ridden section of Paris now about to be demolished and rebuilt in "city beautiful" fashion.

The house before which his taxi dropped him was a solid stone building, without a light showing anywhere. The ancient and massive bronze gates were ten feet high, but in one of them was set a small door, which was standing ajar, giving entrance to the usual courtyard of these old-time Paris dwellings.

North stepped inside.

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY OF THE WALL.

AS North stepped into the entrance, a shadowy figure in the street behind him also slid through the opening; but he was unaware of it. North saw an entresol light to the right, and opened the door. A typically Parisian *concierge,* a heavy-jawed lady occupied with her knitting, looked up inquiringly.

"Does M. Solomon live here?" queried North, rather confusedly.

"But certainly, *m'sieur,*" came the response. "Straight ahead, across the court."

Thanking the good dame, North closed the door, passed through the entrance arch, and bore straight across the courtyard. It was unlighted, but windows around emitted thin gleams of light. Ahead of him loomed a white object like a statue, midway of the courtyard. Abruptly, without the slightest warning, this statue moved, and spoke in English.

"Good evening, Mr. North. Did you come alone?"

"Yes," said North, halting in surprise.

"Come with me, if you please."

The statue revealed itself as a man in snowy white robes, probably an Arab. North followed him toward the dark walls ahead, where a dark doorway loomed. At this instant, a sudden shrill, gasping cry wailed up and was checked; there was the crash of a body falling.

North swung around. A splutter, and the whole courtyard was illumined by a ghastly greenish radiance. A dozen feet behind, North saw the body of a man outstretched on the cobblestones, a long curved Basque knife in his hand. No one else was near.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed North. "This is—"

"Come!" His guide, a lean dark man, touched his arm. "This does not concern us. The man intended to murder you. Come."

With an effort, North forced himself to obey. It was all unreal. The doorway ahead swung open, and Dick North passed from shock into further unreality—into a dream of the Arabian Nights brought to life.

An Arab in snowy white salaamed profoundly, took his hat and stick, and ushered him into a huge room. His guide had disappeared. North had a confused impression of a strange radiance like sunlight coming from crystal panes in the walls—a light wherein the natural colors of everything were transmuted into strange hues. He vaguely noted gorgeous jeweled lanterns and chandeliers, rich rugs and hangings, brocaded walls. Then another Arab appeared and held open a curtain for him.

"Solomon Effendi awaits you, Mr. North," he said in English.

Dumb, North passed into a smaller,

plainer room—a room absolutely bare except for a large desk and several chairs, and one magnificent Shiraz rug upon the floor. From a large crystal pane in the ceiling came the same strange light, making red lips purple and white skins a ghastly yellow—yet a pleasant light withal.

Two men here. One the same little pudgy man whom North had met in the park, puffing at the same old clay pipe; the other a dark, handsome, highly dressed gentleman who looked rather startled at the intrusion. The cockney looked up and nodded at North.

"Werry glad to see you, Mr. North, and I 'opes you won't mind excusing me a moment or two. This 'ere ain't no private conwersation, as the old gent said when 'e met the pretty 'ousemaid a strolling in the park. Now, Your 'Ighness, we needn't 'ave no secrets from me old friend Mr. North, so go right ahead, sir, if you please!"

North dropped into a chair, bewildered, perplexed. Then, as the dark man spoke, his bewilderment passed into a sharp, vivid interest.

"Very well, Mr. Solomon," and the speaker's voice rose in sharp anger. "You are an absolute liar. You make charges that have no foundation. You say I was connected with the murder of those men—it is false! I had nothing to do with it."

"Your 'Ighness," and the old man at the desk spoke apologetically, "I says as 'ow I don't want to 'ave no dealings wi' bloody murderers—"

"But it's a lie!" cried out the "Highness" angrily.

The pudgy little man removed the clay pipe from his mouth, leaned back in his swivel chair, cocked one foot on an open desk drawer, and waved his pipe at the blank wall before him.

"Werry good, Your 'Ighness," he said, and his left hand touched a button in the top of the desk. "S'pose as 'ow we admits a bit o' proof, sir—just like that!"

THE dark gentleman looked at the wall. North looked at it—and to his amazement saw a picture there, and the picture moved, focused! North glanced around. The opposite wall was blank also. There was no machinery in the room. He could find no logical explanation.

Two men in gorgeous uniforms showed in the picture. One was this dark man at the desk, the other an officer who saluted him stiffly, turned, and walked out of the picture. The dark man sitting at the desk gasped, clutched at his armchair—saw himself stride along that blank wall, enter a motor car and be driven away.

The pictured car whirled through streets, halted. The dark man in uniform got out and entered a building. Then he was standing at a window, smoking a cigarette, looking down into a courtyard where six men stood in line, blindfolded. A file of soldiers drew up, presented arms, aimed, fired; the six men toppled grotesquely over. The dark man at the window laughed and flung a remark over his shoulder. The officer who had first appeared, came into the picture, saluted. The dark man laughed, gave him a cigarette; and suddenly all the picture was gone.

The handsome dark gentleman at the desk had collapsed. He was staring at the pudgy little old man with frightened, haunted eyes—eyes that burned against a withered face.

"Well?" he said, nervously wetting his lips. "I—I don't understand."

"There you be, sir, just like that,"

said the cockney, his wide blue eyes betraying no emotion whatever. "And if I ain't mistook, there's summat more a comin' on that 'ere wall."

The dark man jerked about. Words came on the wall; luminous, shining words in an alphabet North did not know, but took to be Russian. The dark man cried out terribly.

"What do you want?" rang his voice, tortured. "Name it, name it!"

The man at the desk pushed toward him a document and a fountain pen. The dark man collected himself to read the paper; then he lifted frightful eyes.

"You unspeakable devil!" he exclaimed, and reached for the pen. He dashed down a word. "Take it, damn you!"

"And a werry good thing, Your 'Ighness," said the cockney solemnly. "If you 'adn't signed this 'ere paper, you'd ha' been a dead man to-morrow morning. And there ain't no good in bein' dead, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid—"

But the dark man had left the room, staggering. The cockney swung his chair about, sucked at his pipe, and looked at North.

"That 'ere prince," he observed, "is a mortal bad lot, 'e is; made 'is blessed family a lot o' trouble, sir. Now 'e's took care of. And 'ow are you, Mr. North?"

"Out of my depth," said North, and smiled a little. "Are you Solomon?"

"Yes, sir, and werry much at your service," said the other, with a wheezy chuckle. In the wide blue eyes was a twinkling comprehension of North's amazement. "You're fair bursting to be asking of some questions, sir?"

"Of course. This moving picture business—the man with the knife outside—you don't know about him, I suppose?"

Solomon touched the button on his desk. North looked up, saw a picture come again on the wall: the courtyard with the man lying there, dead, knife in hand. Solomon pulled an extension telephone from the side of the desk. He was speaking in Arabic, as North realized. Then he gestured again to the wall, and North looked up. An exclamation broke from him. He saw a bloodless dead face—and recognized it. The picture faded.

"You know 'im, sir?" asked Solomon.

"My Lord, yes!" exclaimed North. "Caporni—my late assistant in Libya!"

Solomon sighed wheezily. "And werry likely 'e was a going to do you in, and one o' me own men got 'im. It's a werry bad 'abit, but it does get done, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousekeeper. If so be as you'd like to smoke, sir, go ahead."

NORTH lighted a cigarette, and tried to marshal his wits.

"Hocus-pocus or plain magic?" he inquired, waving his match toward the wall. Solomon knocked out his pipe on the tile floor, produced a plug of villainous black tobacco and a knife, and leisurely began to whittle a fresh load.

"I ain't as young as I was, Mr. North, for a fact," he observed reminiscently. "I've 'ad me good days and me bad uns; I've 'ad me share in life, and a werry good time I've 'ad, too, if I do say it as shouldn't. And now 'ere I be in Paris—a doing what? Well, sir, I'm 'elping of me friends, just like that. And I ain't doing it by magic, but by science—me not being as spry as I was in me younger days. Science, Mr. North, is a wonderful thing."

Solomon paused, teased out the tobacco, stuffed his pipe. North sat fascinated. Here was a queer old man, insignificant, shabby, uneducated; yet holding something terrible in those placid blue eyes. A maniac? Certainly not. What, then? As though to his thought, came the answer.

"I must be telling you as 'ow I 'ave more money than I care for, Mr. North," said Solomon. "Spending money is a mortal 'appy occupation, but a werry ticklish one, as the old gent said when 'e 'ired the pretty 'ousemaid. You'd be surprised, Mr. North, if I was to tell you how many chemists and scientists are a working things out for me in laboratories! These 'ere pictures, now," and Solomon waved his pipe at the wall, "are all werry fine in their place; but their place ain't nowheres but here in this room. It's the same wi' me. As long as I'm setting 'ere with these 'ere violet ray lights to keep me from getting old, I'm all werry good; but I'm needing a younger man to do me odd jobs, so to speak."

A buzzer sounded beneath the desk. North was wondering whether he were in a dream or listening to the ravings of a maniac; then he was abruptly shifted to acute realization that he dealt with hard and sober fact. Solomon took up the telephone, listened, and spoke.

"Werry good. Put 'im on the amplifier and leave this 'ere connection," and he laid down the receiver, and went back to stuffing his pipe. A voice leaped out of the air.

"Stinson speaking, Mr. Solomon. Just reached the Marseilles office—didn't dare send word before getting here. Dominetti's agent in Alexandria died on Thursday. I have his papers. They include a remarkable scheme for mining and wrecking the Suez Canal just west of the lakes. Every detail is perfect. The proof of its having been planned by Fascist elements is elaborate and perfect. That's all of moment."

Solomon picked up the receiver. "Werry good, Mr. Stinson," he said. "Don't come on to Paris, but catch the night boat out o' Marseilles. It ain't safe for you in France, sir. You go by sea to London and 'and over them there papers to Lord Northing with me compliments. You ain't 'ad no report from Jerusalem?"

"You know Johnson was killed on Wednesday?" said the voice.

"Yes, but I ain't 'ad no report," said Solomon wheezily.

"I have a report sent me Wednesday. The Franco-British boundary agreement with Angora was arranged and was to be signed Wednesday night. Evidently Johnson was murdered before the meeting and the documents were lost. I ordered Meacham there at once from Bagdad, by air. You'll probably hear from him in the morning. Any further orders?"

"That's all, sir," said Solomon.

He resumed his methodical filling of the villainous old clay pipe. North sat silent. He knew this was no hocus-pocus; his mind was already grappling with the situation. Those pictures on the wall had some explanation, as had this conversation; television and radio, of course, carried to their logical extremes.

"This 'ere light"—and North found the mild blue eyes resting upon him reflectively—"is one o' me own inwentions, sir. Quartz rays developed for service in the 'ome, so to speak. Werry beneficial I find it, and it's 'elping to an old man like me. Well, sir, I 'opes as 'ow you didn't take on that 'ere project for them 'ere gents this noon?"

North swallowed hard at this shot, but was past showing surprise.

"I deferred a decision until to-morrow," he said.

"And a werry good thing, too. That 'ere Harden is by way o' being a scoundrel, sir. If I may make so bold, 'e told you as 'ow Dominetti is behind 'im?"

"He told me certain things in confidence," returned North.

"And s'pose you took 'is job, but was to be workin' for me all the while, sir?"

"If you'd propose such a thing," said North calmly, "I'd not care to be associated with you. I don't work for any man and betray him."

Solomon chuckled wheezily, lighted his pipe, and touched the button on his desk. North's eyes leaped to the wall.

He saw a map outlined there; it was the country about La Calle and Tunis, with the Algerian border. A star suddenly glowed red at a certain spot.

"There you are, sir," said Solomon, "this 'ere irrigation project. The scheme is for you to be buildin' of it with Italian workmen from Tunis. All of a sudden they puts on black shirts, just like that, and we 'ave a Fascist march on Tunis."

"WHAT?" North stiffened as he sensed the possibilities of such a thing. "You don't mean it seriously? Why, if Italy did such a thing it 'd mean war!"

"Italy wouldn't be a doing of it, sir; wouldn't know a blessed thing about it. But France would never believe that for a minute. Before it got ironed out, Italy would 'ave a mortal black eye, and somebody would clean up millions in stocks, just like that!"

"Oh!" said North, slowly. "A Royalist frame-up?"

"No, sir; a Dominetti frame-up," and Solomon's wheezy chuckle leaped out. "This 'ere Dominetti is a werry clever man, sir, and a werry big man in 'is way, and 'e 'as an organization of the smartest crooks in the world, just like that. That 'ere gent will never 'ave a thing pinned on 'im, so to speak. Harden is one of 'is big men."

North thought fast. "If what you say is true," he rejoined slowly, lighting a cigarette, feeling for words, "then—then this irrigation job would have been pinned on me. My record would be aired. Hm! Did this crowd have anything to do with my getting kicked out of Libya?"

Solomon chuckled and sucked at his pipe. "You're a getting on, Mr. North! I've been inwestigatin' things a bit, sir, and I wouldn't be surprised if we'd uncover something yet. That 'ere Caporni, your assistant—'im that got killed outside—'e was one of the gang. I expect 'e was on your trail, ready to knife you if so be as you was a coming to see me. Dominetti, 'e knows I'm after 'im. Human life ain't nothing to that man, sir."

"Nor to you, apparently," said North dryly, remembering how Caporni had died.

"It's werry cheap, as the old gent said when 'e caught the butler a kissing of 'is wife. I've 'ad me eye on you, sir. I've 'ad to pick me men careful like, and I've picked you."

"Thank you," said North half ironically. "Salary and duties?"

"Ten thousand dollars a year and expenses, sir. Expenses may run to 'alf a million. Two months' trial. If so be as you likes me and I likes you, money ain't no object. Your job right now is to fight this 'ere Harden."

"He's going to Algeria," said North, recovering from this staggering proposal.

"Not much 'e ain't!" and Solomon chuckled. "Not 'im! 'Is job is to kill the Duke o' York, who's a coming to Paris day after to-morrow on the quiet, so to speak. Your job is to stop 'im."

"Eh?" North stared hard at the pudgy little man, met those blank blue eyes, and doubted his own senses. "Are you trying to string me?"

"Dang it!" exclaimed Solomon, with a trace of irritation. "If so be as the duke was shot by a Fascist, where would Italy be? Ain't you got sense enough—"

"Dang it yourself," said North, cutting in. "Use your magic pictures! Use your organization! If this fantastic thing is true, then send out warnings, have Harden arrested—"

Solomon sighed wheezily. "Dang it, Mr. North, where's your 'ead, sir? Tricks—that's what them pictures are. And I ain't doing of no arresting or warning. If so be as you find a snake coiled in your bed, sir, what d'you do? Kill 'im, just like that. In me younger days, when I was a bit spryer, I could 'andle these 'ere jobs me own self, but I ain't what I used to be, as the old gent said when 'e fired the 'ousekeeper. You and me together, sir, we'll 'andle this 'ere gent. Two of me best men was killed last month, and we've got to look spry, Mr. North. Most of me men 'ere are Arabs, and this ain't no job for an Arab."

North puffed at his cigarette. Inwardly, excitement stirred him. He had begun to grasp what sort of man this was sitting here before him—or at least, he thought he did. The possibility gripped him. It might be all a fantastic dream, of course, but if by any chance it were true—and the consulate had certainly known Solomon—

"And now, sir," said Solomon abruptly, "is it yes or no?"

North blinked. "Yes."

Solomon opened a desk drawer. "Werry good, sir. You'll move to the 'Otel Imperial to-morrow morning; a suite's ready for you there. I'll 'ave your man bring around your car at ten, sir. And now, if you'll be so good as to turn up your right sleeve, and put on this 'ere glove?"

North asked no questions. He took the long right-hand gauntlet that was handed him, rolled up his sleeve, and donned the leather. He perceived that an aperture of peculiar shape was cut in the back, so that it came just at his wrist. Solomon turned a wall-switch, and another light behind his desk was turned on—a light set into the wall behind a crystal or quartz pane, stronger than that overhead. North could see the running mercury fusing and bubbling behind the glass.

"While it's a gettin' 'ot, sir," said Solomon wheezily, "I might say as 'ow I'm a going to mark your 'and a bit. We'll keep a doing this from time to time, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid. You'll 'ave me own mark on your wrist, like all me men, and then there can't be no mistakes. Sunburn, it is."

He produced a watch, held up the back of North's hand to the crystal pane, and counted the minutes carefully. North perceived that the diagram cut in the leather was being reproduced by the violet rays in a sunburned pattern on his wrist. And of a sudden he realized what this diagram was—two interlaced triangles, forming a six-pointed star, known to all the Eastern world as the Seal of Solomon.

"Werry good, sir." Solomon switched off the light, put up his watch, and resumed his pipe. "And now the car's a waiting for you, Mr. North."

"Eh?" North, laying down the glove, gave Solomon a sharp look. "And what am I to do?"

"Don't trust nobody, sir, unless 'e 'as me mark on 'is wrist, just like that. You'll 'ear from me to-morrow, sir. Good night, and a werry good job all around, I calls it!"

Dazedly, North took his departure. He was in a whirl, mentally. The whole adventure was fantastic, incredible. This pudgy little man with cockney accent, his new employer? This dealing with titled gentry and international politics—was it real or fake? When he came out into the courtyard he found it brilliantly lighted. A liveried chauffeur and a powerful Hispano were awaiting him, and to his amazement North saw his own initials on the car door in a large silver monogram.

"Hotel Vignon, *m'sieur?*" asked the chauffeur, an Arab.

"Yes," murmured North. So they knew where he lived, then, knew his little hotel behind the Madeleine! He felt helpless, bewildered. He had scarce collected himself when the car swung out of the Boulevard Haussmann and a moment later was standing at his hotel entrance. The chauffeur opened the door and saluted, white teeth gleaming.

"I am Yusuf, *m'sieur,*" he said. "I will be here at ten in the morning."

North nodded and entered the hotel.

In the key-box he found a note awaiting him. It requested him to call at the consulate at eleven in the morning, as there was a most important communication for him from Rome—one which would give him extreme gratification.

Dick North went to bed, hoping he would wake up sane on the morrow.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE NET.

NEXT morning North was wakened by the arrival of his coffee and rolls. When the maid had departed, he sat up suddenly in bed, spurred by remembrance. A dream, or reality? Then he looked at his right wrist. There, faintly yet distinctly outlined in the vivid red of sunburned skin, was the symbol formed by two interlaced triangles.

"That much is true, anyhow!" thought North, and reached for his tray. "But what about the rest of it? I think somebody has been pulling a game. We'll see at ten o'clock."

That visit of the previous night seemed more like hallucination than reality; he still felt there must have been a trick somewhere. The letter from the consulate, however—no joke about that! Something had happened in Libya or Rome, beyond question.

At ten o'clock, Yusuf appeared for his luggage. He was a merry-eyed Arab, with the salute of a soldier. North had picked up a little Arabic in Libya, and tried it out on Yusuf with laughing results.

He found the car adorned with his own monogram awaiting him in the street.

From this point Dick North yielded to the fate which had enmeshed him; a very pleasant fate, it seemed. He was carried to the Hotel Imperial, one of those imitation-palatial structures which the French call tourist-traps; here he was received with deference and led to a suite on the second floor—in Paris the third floor. The suite was

the acme of luxury: a bedroom, a large tiled bathroom, with a sitting and reception room, all very large, their brocade-curtained windows looking out upon a vista of the Champs Elysées. A valet appeared and offered his services, which North refused; and Yusuf presently arrived with the last of his bags.

"Orders, *m'sieur?*" said the Arab. "Shall I unpack your things?"

"I'll do it." North inspected the man curiously. "I must go to the consulate at eleven. Are you wholly at my service, or have you other duties?"

"None but your orders, *m'sieur.*"

"Do you speak English?"

Yusuf grinned. "No, *m'sieur.*"

"How long have you been with Mr. Solomon?"

"Ten years, *m'sieur.* And my father before me served Solomon Effendi many years."

"Eh?" North's brows lifted. "How old is Solomon?"

Yusuf shrugged. "Solomon Effendi has no age, *m'sieur.*"

Seeing that he would learn nothing, North dismissed the Arab and set about unpacking.

He had not half finished when his telephone rang, and the desk clerk announced that a M. Dupont had called to see him. North ordered him sent up, and went on with his work. Presently a knock came, and the door opened to admit a typical Frenchman of the small banker type—broad in the chest, with an enormous, carefully brushed beard, an impressive manner, and a red ribbon at his lapel.

"Good morning, M. North," he said; and with a bow extended a card. "I was sent to ask that you come to this address at noon or before, to meet my friend M. Solomon."

North was relieved, for he had been wondering when he would see Solomon again, and whence his instructions would come. A glance at the card showed him that the address was a villa in Auteuil. After his visit to the consulate, then.

"At noon, M. Dupont?" he inquired.

The other bowed.

"If that is convenient. May I have the privilege of picking you up, M. North?"

"Thanks; I have my own car, and I shall probably be running around town all morning," returned North. "I'll be there at twelve, or a little before."

M. Dupont bowed and withdrew impressively. North chuckled at memory of those luxuriant whiskers; the lower-class Frenchman's idea of fierce mustaches and wild hairs as a sort of protective coloration always amused him.

He went on with his unpacking, and then for the first time opened his morning paper and searched for any news of Caporni. As he had expected, the paper contained nothing about the dead man in Solomon's courtyard. News is not a matter of catching the next edition, anywhere east of the Gulf Stream. Perhaps the matter had been hushed up.

How far was Solomon a charlatan, a hot-air artist? How much of last night's business had been staged for effect? How much of that melodramatic crook-talk was pure bosh? North thought about this, then suddenly wakened to the fact that he had no choice. He must either accept the pudgy little man at full face value, or reject him utterly as a fraud. No halfway measure would do. Yet, there was no reason for fraud.

"And I'm not worth setting such a stage for," thought North soberly. "If

that man is genuine, I've dropped into something big. If he's a fraud—well, he's no worse than Harden *et al.!* I must pass by and let those birds know that I'm not playing with them, too."

So he descended, got into his car, and went to the Continental. Neither Harden nor Billings was there, somewhat to his relief. He left word with their secretary that he could not consider their offer, scribbled a brief note to the same effect, and departed.

AT eleven sharp he walked into the consulate, to be met with staggering news. Rome had wired that his case was r e o p e n e d. The Libyan operations were developing into a gigantic scandal in which North appeared entirely guiltless; one official of the company had committed suicide, two were under arrest, and Caporni, the chief assistant, had disappeared. North was asked not only to resume his post, but was invited to come to Rome immediately.

"Which means only one thing," said the smiling consular official. "They'll do the right thing by you. Congratulations, Mr. North! I suppose you still feel bitter against the Duce?"

North shrugged. "No; he's all right. Well, I don't know just what to say to this; you see, I've accepted another position in the meantime."

The other gave him a sharp look. "Not with—"

"The Mr. Solomon whom I mentioned yesterday."

"Oh! Then, if I were you," and the official smiled slightly, "I'd talk it over with Mr. Solomon; perhaps he can straighten things out very simply."

North departed in sober mood. He felt no exultation over his probable justification; he was, instead, lost in wonder. Had Solomon known of these things beforehand? How far was his system of agents real, how far was it bluff? And how could Solomon straighten things out? The official's knowing smile, coupled with what Solomon himself had said the previous night, threw a sudden sharp ray of light on North's problem.

"Can Solomon be a sort of agent for Mussolini, then?" he asked himself. "Perhaps. Blast it, I have to accept the man at face value. There's no alternative! This Arabian Nights dream is solid fact!"

He gave Yusuf the Auteuil address of M. Dupont and settled back on the cushions, and dismissed his ponderings. Heading across the Place de la Concorde, the Hispano swept out for the Grenelle bridge with a tremendous burst of speed and power; the luxury of it was incredible. Turning into Rue La Fontaine, Yusuf swung into a side street of steep cobbles that climbed the hills of Passy, and presently halted before a villa surrounded by gardens and a high wall.

"You needn't wait," said North, when Yusuf had rung the bell at the gate and held open the car door for him. "I'll probably leave with M. Solomon, or take a taxi when we've finished. Take the afternoon off and enjoy life."

Yusuf looked a little surprised, but saluted, grinned, and obeyed. North turned to the gate, which was opened by an old woman in a lace cap.

"M. North?" she said. "You are expected. Enter, if you please."

North walked up a trim garden path of gravel to the house beyond, set well back from the street in spacious grounds. As he approached, the door was opened by a man all in black, who ushered him into a room on the right of a long corridor.

"If *m'sieur* will have the kindness to be seated, I will advise M. Dupont."

North found himself in an oppressive reception salon which looked as though it had not changed in the least detail for at least fifty years. The satin walls, the heavy window-drapes, the ornate crystal chandeliers, the bad paintings and excellent portraits, were all in the approved taste of a past generation. North even fancied there was a musty smell in the air, as though the place had been long shut up.

Dupont came into the room, whiskers and all, and greeted North with a warm handshake.

"Ah, my dear *monsieur,* I am charmed to have you beneath my humble roof!" he exclaimed. "M. Solomon has just telephoned; he is delayed and will not be here for twenty minutes. It is a little luncheon, you comprehend; the three of us. We shall discuss certain affairs, settle certain matters. M. Solomon tells me that you are about to take over some business matters for him—you have joined his following, eh?"

"Yes," said North, accepting the chair offered. "You have known him long, *monsieur?*"

Dupont waved a hand in the air.

"Oh, not long—a matter of fifteen years or so. You recall, he was established in Port Said at one time? His little shop was a famous place in those days. I was attached to the Bureau des Postes there, at the time. A wonderful man, M. Solomon—his influence with the Arabs—ah!"

And M. Dupont eloquently blew a kiss to the chandelier. North was interested.

"Influence with the Arabs? I didn't know that," he returned. "Of course, I really know little about him."

Dupont laid one finger along his nose, glanced around, and leaned forward with an expressive wink.

"But, my dear *monsieur,* you know about the business in hand, *n'est-ce pas?*"

North remembered abruptly—the Duke of York in Paris! And there had been an item in the morning paper about the arrival of the royal guest.

"Oh, of course, of course," he rejoined, leaning back. Dupont beamed, then looked around and came to his feet.

"Ah, the little Madeleine. My dear, this is M. North."

NORTH rose. A young woman, slim and dark, with masses of black hair braided and coiled about her head, was entering the room. She extended her hand, and North awkwardly bowed over it with the conventional phrase. Her eyes were fastened upon him with a certain intensity, and as he met her gaze, he thought to himself that he had seldom met a more unattractive young lady. She was beautiful enough, yet a peculiar feline savagery was written in her face.

"My niece," said Dupont in his grandiose way, "who manages this little house for me. Madeleine, my dear, M. North will join me in a glass of my birth-year Vouvray—the famous *crû* of '82! Every drop of it is in my own cellar, *monsieur;* it has an aroma, this wine, of the real nectar and ambrosia of the Elysian Fields—or was it Olympus? I am a little vague as to the classical allusion, to tell the truth. However, you shall judge of the vintage for yourself."

The black-clad servant entered with a silver tray. North glanced again at the girl, as she took the bottle when it was opened, and poured the wine in-

to long slender glasses. Her features were peculiar, strange in their odd expression—some effect of her brilliant eyes and dark, heavy brows, that was hard to define. Then she was handing him a glass, and the smile upon her lips changed all his impression of her, gave him a quick warmth.

"Success!" exclaimed Dupont, lifting his own glass reverently, looking at the honey-colored wine, sniffing it with the air of a connoisseur. "Success to us all—to you and to me, *monsieur;* to our little Madeleine, success!"

North tasted his wine. The first drop on his tongue sent a pleasant fire through his veins. It was not a wine, but a heavenly ichor, unlike anything he had ever tasted before. Or was it the glowing eyes of the girl that thus affected him? He laughed suddenly, and raised his glass.

"Aye, success to us all!" he said, and drank.

He heard Dupont's laugh, a rich and hearty laugh that drew his eyes to the man. Then he saw something, as Dupont held glass to light. The man's right wrist, thick-haired, bore no sunburned emblem. What was it Solomon had said? "Don't trust nobody, sir, unless 'e 'as me mark on 'is wrist."

North put down his glass. "I'd like to use your telephone a moment, if I may," he said.

"But certainly, *monsieur!*" exclaimed Dupont, cordially. "Come, it is in the little salon."

North went with him to the door. Then something queer happened. The doorway vanished. Dupont's whiskered visage became all blurred. The walls wavered and fell away, and the hard bleak boards of the floor beyond the carpet-edge seemed very close and distinct. North caught himself, sagged down—and his memory failed.

Dupont turned, looked down at the inert figure, and then flung a laugh at Madeleine.

"Good! Make all arrangements here, my dear. We shall be ready in five minutes. Émile!"

The black-clad servant entered. There was no confusion, no haste; everything was ready and was done with admirable precision. Dupont and Emile lifted North and carried him out of the room, through the house to the rear, and across the garden path to the old stable, whose doors were standing open. A large closed car was standing there.

North's inert form was placed inside the car. The black-clad Emile darted into the stables and presently emerged with chauffeur's cap and white coat. M. Dupont walked around the house to the front gates, where he engaged the old lady in lace cap in conversation, and yellow bank notes glinted in the noonday sun as she counted them over.

The car came down the drive to the gates, and halted. In the rear sat Madeleine, two suitcases at her feet; a robe was flung over the form of North, hiding it from sight. Emile opened the high gates and got in; Dupont got in beside him; a moment later the car was rolling out into the narrow cobbled street. The old *concierge* closed the gates again, as the car swiftly turned left and went leaping downhill toward the Seine.

The street was quite empty except for one of the omnipresent Algerine peddlers who infest Paris. A huge bale of imitation rugs made in Lyons was slung over one shoulder, imitation pearls glittered about his neck, a dirty fez was cocked over one ear; he was leaning against a wall, dozing lazily in the warm sunlight.

As the car turned down the street, however, this peddler wakened from his doze and took a sharp step out to the edge of the sidewalk. There he held up one arm high, shaking a cascade of pearls in the air; then he crossed the street to where the old *concierge* was closing the gates.

"Nice pearls, *ma'm'selle*," he said. "Fine pearls! Rugs from Constantinople!"

"Get out, you dirty one," spat the old dame, and slammed the gates fast.

The Algerine grinned, shrugged, called Allah to witness his shame, and went slouching away down the street.

CHAPTER IV.

HALF A SHOE.

IT was dark when North came vaguely to his senses; vaguely, for his tongue was thick and his head was dizzy, and his brain was slow to comprehend and translate anything that went on. After a time he found soft hands on his face, was dimly aware that he was being helped to sit up; a woman kissed him and laughed, softly but terribly, so that he was swept by a swift, keen fear. Then he was drinking a cold draft.

For one instant he came full to himself, saw the girl Madeleine sitting beside him, and met her eyes as she watched him and held an empty silver cup. Then, even as he started to speak, fog came upon his brain again and he could not remember anything further.

North sat there on the bed, his eyes wide open, and after a moment Madeleine turned and set down the cup. From the doorway advanced Dupont.

"Good!" said the girl, calmly. "Now he is ready. Tell M. Harden that I am bringing him."

"But there is delay," said Dupont, spreading out his hands. "If you—"

"Fool!" said Madeleine, looking at him. "Don't you know better than to voice objections? When you talk to me, hairy ape, watch your tongue!"

She took a step toward him, her face very white, her eyes dark and large. Dupont's jaw fell, and as he turned and hurried out of the room he crossed himself hurriedly.

Madeleine went back to the bed, took North by the hand, told him to get up. He obeyed, and stood there docile. He was fully dressed. Madeleine smoothed his clothes a little, pulled at his necktie, then stood looking him in the face for a moment, curiously. Those singular features of hers were cold, predatory, not nice to look upon.

"You are handsome, my fine fellow," she said, and leaning forward, kissed him on the lips. "Perhaps I shall save you for myself—why not? There are worse men in the world. Well, come along now, tell what you know, and to-morrow we'll talk things over, you and I. Walk after me, and speak when you're spoken to, like a good chap."

No expression came into North's face. He stood there like a wooden man, looked at her, through her, as though not seeing her. Obviously one part of his brain was awake, for he obeyed her command at once, and walked after her to the doorway. His eyes, wide and unwinking, no longer sleepy and careful, looked unnatural, but otherwise he appeared quite himself.

Madeline left the room, and this automaton, who had been Dick North, walked after her, along a passage. Windows gave glimpses of gardens, a high stone wall inclosing them; the house itself, like the other in Auteuil,

gave every indication of having been a luxurious abode of the past generation. Stained glass windows, delicate painted ceilings, brocaded walls, heavy paneling, and everything kept in the pink of condition. A maid in trim apron and Breton lace cap appeared, saluted Madeleine and passed on.

Now they were in a room—the grand salon of the house, with windows on the garden and at the far end a glass conservatory filled with rare plants. A large table of Buhl work, deep rugs, cabinets of the little *objets d'art* so loved by French minds, gorgeous walls of yellow brocade; and men. At the table sat Harden, with two men sitting at his right. His bronzed face with its big nose and thin-slitted eyes lifted, and he shot a glance at Madeleine and the automaton behind her.

"Good work, girl," he said in French. "Let him wait. Reports coming in—something's gone wrong. Don't know what."

The telephone buzzed. Harden took up the desk receiver and lifted it. For an instant a blaze leaped in his eyes.

"Gone, you say?" His voice fairly crackled. "And no word from him? He was to have been there to meet Piacenza at six thirty— All right."

He laid down the receiver and crooked his finger at one of the two men, obviously an Italian. The man stood up quickly.

"Billings has disappeared," said Harden. "He didn't meet Piacenza at six thirty, and hasn't been to the Continental. Go find him. Need money?"

The Italian shook his head and departed without a word. Madeleine spoke with an assured air which told clearly enough her position. She was no hireling.

"What could have happened, then?"

Harden leaned back and gazed at her sardonically. "My dear girl, how do I know? Wait and see. You haven't met Le Crotal? He's innocent of French—speak English. Here, Rattler, this is the prize skirt," and Harden turned to the other man and spoke in English. "Get me?"

"Yeah. Pleased to meet ya," and Le Crotal, or the Rattler, stood up, jerked at his hat, and shook hands with Madeleine. He was an Italian-American, weazened, sharp-eyed, with a merry and thin-lipped smile that warmed his cold face.

"I am please' to meet you, Meestair Crotal," said the girl, laughing a little.

"SIT down, Madeleine," said Harden indifferently. "The Rattler's an imported Chicago gunman, and he'll do the work. Fiave and Ciro are ready for the martyr rôle—they'll parade their black shirts and so forth, and their guns will show they fired the shots. All's clear."

The telephone buzzed. Harden spat a word into the receiver, listened, laid it down.

"To-morrow at three, then," he said, meeting the eyes of the girl, and bit at a cigar. "The Duke of York leaves Etretat in the morning. He gets in at two. There'll be the usual didoes at the station, with committees and so forth. He'll get to his hotel at three. We'll have everything set for then. Suit you, Rattler?"

"Yeah." The Rattler stood up. "Now we're all set, I'll blow. I got a date with a dame for to-night."

Harden looked up sidewise at him, and under this look the Rattler recoiled slightly.

"Let me tell you something," said Harden in a low voice. "Go on and

keep your date, but you show up here at nine in the morning, get me? If you don't, there'll be somebody right close on your tail to see that you do. Don't think for a minute that you'll be alone to-night."

The Rattler grinned. "All right, big boy," he said, and reached under his arm. "Here's my rod, see? I ain't lettin' these here cops pull no Sullivan law on me."

Harden took the pistol and put it in a drawer, laughing. "Go on, Rattler; go on!" he said. "Be a good boy and forget the cops. If you get pinched, sing low, and you'll be sprung in ten minutes. This is my town, see? Have a good time. There's a taxi waiting for you."

The Rattler nodded to Madeleine and sauntered out.

Left alone, Harden looked at the girl, met her eyes, tensed a little.

"Trouble," he said, meeting her unspoken question without evasion. "We did well to get this North. That devil Solomon is going to raise Cain with us, somehow. I can't place him or his men.

"We can't discover a thing about him, what he's doing, how to reach him. Billings had a lead—and has disappeared. Jack and Florio are on the job; Florio telephoned this afternoon that they had struck something and would have news to-night. Nothing's come—"

The telephone buzzed. Harden picked it up, and his voice leaped shrill.

"What—he is? All right. You can send him in. But give him a drink first."

Excitement blazed in the girl's eyes, flamed in her cheeks, as she leaned forward.

"Who?"

"Jack." Harden tried hard to control himself, but failed. "He's outside. Came in a taxi, in bad shape. Can hardly walk. Something's cracked, I tell you!"

"Bah!" Madeleine shrugged, took a cigarette from an open box, lighted it, and shot a glance at the immobile, wooden figure of North to one side. "Cracks can be mended, my dear boy! You and I are not fools. There is only one mistake you make—when you tell Le Crotal that this is your town. Paris is nobody's town."

"Unless somebody has brains," and Harden smiled thinly. "Let Jack in, will you?"

She nodded, rose, walked out of the room to the outer door, that opened on a *porte-cochère* in the garden.

A door opened, slammed. Into the room, ahead of Madeleine, burst a shambling, terrible figure. A man, disheveled, unhurt in the body, yet his face so paralyzed by unutterable and fearful horror that the impassive Harden came to his feet at first sight of him, and stood staring. The fellow almost collided with North, evaded him, came to a halt before the table and dropped both hands on it. He leaned there, panting, two great eyes fastened upon Harden. His features were twisted, contorted, as though some spasm were upon him.

"Good God!" cried Harden abruptly. "Jack, Jack, what's the matter?"

"I don't know," said the other, and then slid himself into one of the two chairs, buried his face in his hands, remained motionless. Harden made a sign of caution to Madeleine, who had returned and was looking at the newcomer with a frown that was largely contempt.

"Take your time, Jack," said Har-

den. "It's all right now. Where's Florio?"

JACK'S body moved in a convulsive shudder, and he lifted a more controlled face.

"He—he *isn't*," he returned in a shaky voice. "That's all there is to it—he *was*, and now he *isn't*. There isn't any Florio. Listen, Harden! It's got me. I don't know what it is. Something in the air. It hit him square. I—I know it's got me—I got to tell you. Look here, you know Rue Jasmine, down Avenue Mozart? In Auteuil?"

"Yes. The little short street," said Harden.

"Uh-huh. New house been built there, couple o' blocks off the avenue," went on Jack. His voice was controlled, but weaker. "We got a line on it to-day. Low house, two stories, not any windows on the ground floor; and a door that's solid brass. Solid stone house, see? Tracked a man there from Solomon's place—he was the chemist Pearson, the Englishman. We hung around all afternoon. There's a garden in back. We got in there from next door, after dark. Lights all in the back. Car entrance from the side; the house is on a corner. See? Boxes inside. Cases. Chemicals."

"Good!" cried out Harden, and his fist slammed on the table. "Hear that, Madeleine? We've got Solomon's damned laboratory or whatever it is! By heavens, we've got it—"

A fearful groan from Jack interrupted him, silenced him.

"Listen, listen!" cried out the man, almost desperately. "You fool, listen! I've got to tell you. It's—got me! We were there, Florio and I, at the window—on a tree, see? Inside, there was machinery. Pearson was there, and another man. Don't know him. They were working at the machine. Can't describe it. Pearson looked up, saw Florio's face there—the window had no blind or shutters. Then there was a flash. That was all."

Jack shivered again, threw out both hands, then clapped them over his face.

"That was all," he said faintly. "I climbed down. Florio was gone. *Gone*, you understand? There was nothing left. Just one of his shoes. It was on the ground there, by me. Nothing in it. No blood. No foot. Nothing. A shoe—half of it. And I knew something had hit me. I got away—had a taxi waiting—had to tell you. The light was green—green—"

"Buck up," exclaimed Harden, whose bronzed face had gone white. "You're off your nut about Florio. I expect he'll be along almost any time now."

The man in the chair laughed, his face still in his hands. It was a horrible thing to hear, this laugh; even Madeleine straightened up at sound of it; stood with hands clenched. Then the laugh died, and the man slumped down.

Harden gasped, and slipped around the corner of the table and put his hand on the man's shoulder. "Here—no! No use."

Jack slid forward and tumbled out of the chair, and lay sprawled on the floor. He was dead. Harden straightened up and met the gaze of Madeleine. She had gone deathly white, but now she shrugged a little, disdainfully.

"Well, what does it matter?" she said, and showed her white teeth in a smile. "Learning always commands its price."

"You she-devil!" said Harden, and then he, too, laughed and pulled him-

self together. "Good girl. You're right. I'll have him taken care of—then we'll see what else we can learn, eh?"

The impassive figure of North stood there, eyes wide open, a thing of wood.

CHAPTER V.

THE UNWITTING INFORMER.

THE late unfortunate Jack removed, Harden lighted a fresh cigar, pushed the cigarettes toward Madeleine, and watched her light one.

"I admire your nerve, girl," he said quietly. "You're the best I ever met. What do you make of Jack's story?"

"True enough," said Madeleine. "It proved itself. He didn't have a mark on him. Well, you remember this English chemist Pearson? He's the man mixed up in that so-called death ray affair a year or two ago. It did not work."

"It works now," said Harden wryly. "At the same time—ah! Dominetti will know all about it. Take the telephone in my study, will you, and report this business to him? Meantime, I'll be questioning our young friend here."

Madeleine nodded. "Just a moment, though," she observed reflectively. "I like this M. North of yours, and I should be very sorry to have anything happen to him."

Harden smiled grimly. "Oh! So that's it, eh? My dear girl, haven't you smashed enough men in your time? Believe me, North would far rather die and be done with it than remain a prisoner to you—and waken from the dream wrecked and broken!"

She shrugged lazily. "Never mind him; think about me, my dear," and she arose. "Remember, I am rather emphatic about it!"

Harden waved a mocking hand. "Very well; we shall not disagree upon so small a point, I promise you. If you want this poor devil, you shall have him. You gave him the usual amount of the dose?"

"Quite; it hit him at once." Madeleine glanced indifferently at North. "He'll remember a little, not very much, afterward; he'll take it all for a dream. You can ask what you like, and he'll answer truthfully enough."

"Yes, we've had pretty steady luck with your subjects so far," and Harden chuckled. "Well, get that report to Dominetti. We've got to know at once just what sort of a thing we're up against. We can't risk any failure to-morrow. And tell him about Billings; I'll report as soon as we learn anything definite."

Madeleine nodded and passed out of the room.

Harden, puffing reflectively, swung his chair around and looked at North, frowning a little, as though finding it hard to realize that the flesh-and-blood man here before him was no more than an automaton, a creature whose brain was half dead.

"Well, North, ready to talk?" he asked crisply.

"Of course," said North, without change of expression.

"That's fine, fine! Sorry you didn't throw in with me and Billings?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you're crooked, of course."

"Oh!" Harden grinned at this. "And who told you this?"

"Solomon."

"Remarkable man! Tell me all about his house in Rue Montorgeuil,

how you got into it, who was there, and all about it."

North obeyed. He described his visit to Solomon's house in detail, while Harden sat in a queer amazement, half incredulous, half exultant. When his own name came up, Harden started. Madeleine was entering the room, but Harden paid her no heed.

"What's that again?" he cried out. "He said that I was going to kill the duke?"

"Yes," said North. "And that I was to prevent you."

"You look as if you'd do it." Harden drew a deep breath, and looked at Madeleine. "You hear that, girl? Listen, North! What details did he go into about the killing?"

"None. I was to hear from him later."

Madeleine took a hand in the probe, emptying North's brain as though it were a measure holding apples. They got out of him all that he knew about Solomon, which was none too much, yet it raised them both to a keen pitch of eager excitement. When it came to the mark on his wrist, North explained this, showing the token and telling how it had been done.

"Well, that's about all—and it's enough for this time," said Harden, leaning back. "Any news from Dominetti?"

Madeleine nodded. "Enough, and I don't like it," she returned. "He says it is not what we think; it is no death ray, but something else. An atomic disturbance, he called it. I do not understand at all."

"H-m!" Harden's eyes narrowed to slits. "Nor I. Did he say we'd have any trouble?"

"He said that we would have no trouble whatever to-morrow," returned the girl, "provided instructions were followed exactly. The duke goes to his usual hotel in Rue St. Honoré. We are to be in the second floor apartment at two thirty, and to be ready from that time on. Your man from America will use the machine rifle that you and he have prepared, and the two blackshirts will do their part."

Harden made an impatient gesture. "And Billings?"

"Has not been found. Dominetti is leaving by the night express for London, and trusts everything to us."

"Yes." Harden sneered. "He's going to be out of it, and to-morrow afternoon he'll be selling empire stocks short as hell—what a clean-up! Well, girl, we get a good fat percentage. You've arranged everything at the apartment?"

She nodded composedly. "Of course."

HARDEN puffed for a moment. "Only one thing I'm afraid of," he said slowly. "Billings knows everything. If by any chance they've got him, he's likely to talk under torture."

"Then we must discover whether they've got him or not," said Madeleine. "If they have, we must change all our arrangements. If a mere accident has happened, as may very well be the case—"

The telephone buzzed.

Harden lifted the receiver, listened for a moment. "Yes," he said in French. "Yes, *monsieur,* this is M. Harden. I did not catch the place—oh! The *gendarmerie*—at Caen, you say? Yes, all right."

He listened again, and his eyes darted to Madeleine. Then he smiled suddenly, and broke into voluble thanks.

"You will do everything, if you please," he replied. "Tell him that I

will arrive to-morrow evening. Yes, and a thousand thanks once more."

He laid down the receiver, leaned back, and broke into a laugh—a hard, arrogant laugh.

"Billings," he said. "He was with a lady in a car; his lady friend from Grenoble, you comprehend? That was from police headquarters at Caen. There was a smash-up on the road to-day. The lady was a bit hurt, nothing much; Billings was cut a bit by glass, no great damage—mostly shock."

Madeleine leaped into activity. She came to the desk, seized the telephone, and spoke in rapid French—even Harden could scarcely follow it. Then, after a moment, she laid down the receiver and turned.

"In this game, *mon ami,*" she said coolly, "one does not take chances. Any one might put in such a message. I have called back the police station."

A buzz. With a nod of comprehension, Harden responded to the call.

"Yes, it is M. Harden again. Will you have the great kindness to see that the lady is supplied with flowers? Thank you, *monsieur.* I shall, of course, arrange with you to-morrow."

"Good head, Madeleine," he said approvingly, when he had hung up. "Hadn't occurred to me, but it's best to take no chances. Well, that clears things up in fine shape. Will you attend to this North?" He glanced at the American, half frowning. "I tell you, young lady, the best thing is to finish him at once. Let Emile 'take him for a ride'!"

The girl shrugged. "Leave him to me. He'll wake up some time to-morrow, and Emile can look after him until we have attended to the business. We come back here, I believe?"

"Of course. Emile will be waiting with the car to run us here. We pick up our bags, put this man in the car if you want him, and become American tourists bound for the Belgian border. Nothing could be more simple."

"Agreed." Madeleine turned to North and touched his arm. "Come."

They passed out of the room, followed by the cynical gaze of Harden. When they had gone, Harden took a fresh cigar, laughed shortly, and called Dominetti's number, making report that Billings was located and not hurt to mention. Then he lighted his cigar and sent a thin wave of smoke toward the painted ceiling.

"Odd fish, this girl!" he muttered. "I'm thankful she never fell for me. She's a devil in disguise! I could almost feel sorry for—"

A buzz. Harden picked up the telephone, listened. His face changed, became bitter, cold and hard.

"Bring him in," he said, and then, from the table drawer, produced an automatic fitted with a silencer.

Presently three men came into the room. The man in the center, shoved forward by the two others, was an Algerine peddler. He bore no rugs baled over his shoulder, but dark throat and arms were slung with imitation pearl strings. He looked at Harden with frightened eyes and babbled incoherently.

"He has been hanging about in the street, *monsieur,*" said Emile, one of the two captors.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate!" broke out the Algerine, falling on his knees and extending his clasped hands toward Harden. He was a sharp-faced man, very dark. "I meant no harm, *m'sieur!* I have sold nothing all day—I am weak and faint—I have not even five sous to buy a crust of bread, and it is a long walk back to Boulogne."

Harden took up the automatic, and his eyes were like ice.

"What is that mark on your right wrist?" he said, and pointed. The Algerine looked at his wrist, upon which was faintly outlined, against the whiter skin of the forearm, the Seal of Solomon.

"That, *m'sieur?*" said the man in surprise. "That is the mark of my tribe. Preservation against the Evil Eye—"

Harden laughed. "And against bullets also?" he said.

He fired twice; deliberate, unhurried shots. The noise was very slight. The Algerine, knocked sidewise by the impact of two bullets in his brain, fell over in a sprawl of dirty robes and imitation pearls. Harden laid down his weapon and looked at Emile.

"Emile, you know the house in Rue Montorgeuil?" he said. "Good. About dawn, take this carrion and lay it beside the door, and drive off quickly. Before you go, take white paint and make this design upon his forehead."

With a pencil he swiftly drew the two interlaced triangles forming the Seal of Solomon, and Emile took the paper. Harden watched while the limp clay was carried out of the room, then he resumed his cigar, and smiled thinly.

"So you want war, Mr. Solomon?" he murmured. "Good. You shall have it, up to the hilt!"

CHAPTER VI.

ASSASSINS.

TOWARD noon of the following day, North wakened.

As previously, his wakening was fogged and unreal. This time he presently realized that he lay in bed, amid very sumptuous surroundings; the room was ornate, in the extreme of French delicacy. North rather got the idea that it must be a woman's room. The heavy silk draperies of the bed, the gay and beautiful things all around, the satin curtains, the thousand and one little things bespeaking a lady's boudoir, startled him into wider wakefulness.

A voice came abruptly to him and pierced like a knife through his vague cloud—it was the voice of Madeleine, from an adjoining room. He remembered little of what had passed since Dupont had drugged him; confused words, an inchoate floating jumble of phrases and things. Danger lay in this girl's voice, however, and he instantly relaxed again, closed his eyes, lay quiet. She must have come close to him, for he caught a bitter-sweet perfume, then she spoke again.

"Luncheon is served, Emile? Very well. Come back in half an hour and bring a tray—he should waken soon. And be careful. We leave directly after luncheon."

Emile? The black-clad man at Dupont's house! Was he in the same house? North could not tell. When he opened his eyes again, he was alone in the room. He looked about, lifted himself, sat up. He felt no pain, but every motion was mental torture; the drug had affected the controls between brain and muscles. Drugged, no doubt of it! How could he clear his head? In half an hour Emile would be back; what then?

North staggered about the room. The windows were closed by the ever-present *volets*—thin steel shutters closed with bar and padlock, locked. The door was locked. There was no help in sight; nothing! Sinking upon a chair, North clasped his reeling head in both

hands and fought for self-mastery, desperately, vainly. For a moment or two his brain would be clear as crystal, then fog would descend in a swirl.

He fumbled in his pockets, found cigarettes and lighted one. It sickened him after a half dozen puffs. he dropped it, set his foot on it. He went around the room again like a man half blind. A door; a closet, filled with dresses; a niche that held a dressing-table—and another door, curtained. To his amazement, it opened to his thrust.

A room almost exactly similar—Madeleine's room, then? Closed shutters, locked door; he had the run of these two rooms, no more. Again he sank down, and after a minute realized that he was seated before a dressing table. Perfume, toilet water—bottles of it! His hand shaking, he reached out, seized the first bottle in reach, gulped down a thin swallow. It burned him like fire, but it reacted on his brain like driving wind on fog. For a space, everything came clear.

Daylight of the next day—and where was he? Strength came back to him. He tried doors, in vain. He tried the shutters, in vain. He remembered Emile was coming back—how much time had passed? No telling. Sudden hope flooded upon him. There was a fireplace, and by it an iron-and-brass poker, no child's toy. He seized it, hurried back into his own room, saw his clothes on a chair beside the bed, and feverishly climbed into them. He was nearly dressed when, without warning, a swirl of cloud descended on his brain; the brief stimulus of the alcohol had worn off. Like a man stricken, he toppled over, fell on the bed, mechanically pulled up the covers. Then darkness was upon him.

A man's voice broke the swirling waves. "He'll not wake up for a bit. I must go with the car. Remain here, in this room, you comprehend? Watch him, he may be dangerous. If he makes any trouble, shoot him."

Emile, now wearing chauffeur's cap and coat, departed. The door closed. Another man brought a tray to a table; a short thick-set man of peasant type. North closed his eyes, after that one glance, and lay quiet. Again his brain was swept clear. He had the poker in his hand, beneath the coverlet. He remembered now; they were going away.

With sudden decision, North swung his feet clear, sat up on the edge of the bed. The short man turned, saw him, caught up the tray and brought it to the bed.

"If *monsieur* will eat a bite—"

The man did not perceive his danger in time, and then he perceived nothing else at all, for North came up like a flash, and the heavy poker smashed his skull, so that he and the tray together fell forward across the bed with a subdued crash. The man had a gun; good! North leaned over, reached for it—

The fog came down upon him. He battled against it desperately, but in vain. Success in his very grasp, under his hand—and lost! He came to his knees, caught at the bed, slowly went down and lay, this time, very quiet.

WHILE these things were going on in the house of Harden, events in all the rest of Paris were moving toward their appointed destiny.

The Gare St. Lazare was bustling, its dingy old train-sheds and corridors filled with every one who had a uniform to wear, while National Guards, *gendarmes* and agents thronged the passages. Passing potentates and kings were nothing in the life of Paris,

but the smiling duke from across the channel was dear to all hearts—easily the most popular, after his royal brother, of all the titled visitors who found France a playground.

In the Rue St. Honoré, a pudgy little man walked stiffly along, between his teeth an old clay pipe; curious glances were directed at him in passing, for his mild blue eyes seemed fixed on vacancy, and the Basque béret over one ear gave him a grotesque appearance.

As Solomon passed the entry of the National City Bank, a man came down the steps, halted him, shook hands, passed the time of day, and went his way. Solomon went on to the corner of the Rue de Castiglione and was held up by a traffic block. He opened his hand and glanced at a crumpled piece of paper. It was a cable from London, not addressed to him, and unsigned:

> Heavy selling all Empire stocks since noon.

Solomon tore up the paper and crossed as the traffic surged over.

On the other side of the street, a man in chauffeur's uniform, a dark man idling in front of a shop-window, asked a light for his cigarette. Solomon produced a box of matches.

"*Merci, effendi,*" replied the man, saluting, as he returned the box. With it was a key. "The place is empty so far."

"They come in ten minutes," said Solomon in Arabic, and went on.

Half a block away was a large hotel, much frequented by English people of rank who came to Paris; it fronted on the Rue de Rivoli, but its carriage entrance was here in the Rue St. Honoré. Opposite this entrance was gathered a little throng of loafers, about the front of a tiny bar with the oblique tobacco sign flaming over its doorway. Just as Solomon got here, two agents and half a dozen operatives of the Sûreté, the detective headquarters of Paris, suddenly appeared with an officer.

"Hold that man," said the officer, pointing to Solomon. "The rest of you, on your way!"

Two operatives took charge of Solomon, who regarded them placidly and sucked at his pipe. The others sent the idlers on their way, after the manner of French police—not a pleasant manner as a rule. The officer came to Solomon.

"*M'sieur,* your *carte d'identité?*"

Solomon chuckled wheezily and produced an identification card from his pocket. "Two men with workmen's smocks or overcoats over Fascist uniforms," said Solomon. "They'll probably be waiting about here."

The officer returned the card with a bow, made no comment, and vanished with his men. Solomon turned into a doorway, whose stairs gave entry to the offices and apartments above.

Two minutes later he was sitting at the window of a second floor apartment, whose door the key had fitted. Directly opposite and beneath, was the hotel carriage entrance. Solomon produced plug and knife, and began whittling off fresh tobacco and teasing it in his palm. The apartment was fairly well furnished, but unoccupied; it was probably one of those apartments used by the clients of divorce lawyers who desire to establish a "residence" in Paris, where bailiffs may serve papers.

"Dang it!" observed Solomon mildly. "This 'ere apartment must 'ave a back way, but I can't find it. I expect as 'ow it lets out on the Place Vendôme. That there Billings didn't know a thing about it, neither."

He looked down at the street, sighed, tapped down his pipe, and withdrew to another room.

Presently feet were heard in the outer hall, and the door was opened. Harden entered; behind him were Madeleine and the Rattler. Harden closed the door, then swung around as a sharp cry broke from the Rattler:

"It's gone—it's gone! Looky there! We left the gun waitin' by the window—"

Harden's jaw dropped in consternation. There was no machine rifle in the room. Yet he and the Rattler together had arranged everything.

"Lemme out!" Like a flash, a pistol appeared in the Rattler's hand; snarling, smitten with panic, he shoved Harden aside and leaped at the door.

Taking alarm and to flight like a wild beast, he was gone at a bound, and the door slammed behind him. The other two stood there paralyzed, staring at each other. Madeleine's lip curled disdainfully.

"SO!" she said, gazing at Harden in contempt. "This is the end of your fine scheme — oh, you Americans! Bah! You make me sick!"

A wheezy chuckle caused them both to turn.

"Good afternoon, sir and miss," said Solomon, standing in the entrance to the next room. "A werry fine day it is, and werry 'appy I am to see you both. If so be as you'd care to go over me accounts with you, Mr. Harden—"

An incredulous oath burst from Harden. The eyes of Madeleine were wide, startled, amazed.

"Solomon! John Solomon—you devil!"

Solomon chuckled and held a match to his pipe. His blue eyes were wide and blank.

"Now, Mr. Harden, don't you go being all upset, as the old gent said when the 'ousemaid broke 'im the bad news. I 'opes as 'ow you and me will be having a werry polite talk. If I was you, miss, I wouldn't leave—it ain't 'ealthy. That 'ere Rattler was in a terrible 'urry, and if I ain't mistook, it ain't give 'im no luck."

Pointing his words, there was a commotion in the street below; cries, whistles, the sharp bursting sound of a shot. Madeleine darted to the window, then swung about.

"They've got him!" she said, her voice shrill. "This is a trap!"

Harden woke up. A pistol showed in his hand, and he wrenched open the door with an imperative gesture. His face was hard, cold, merciless, his eyes blazed with triumph.

"The get-away, girl!" he cried. "Give me a whistle if it's clear. We've got big game enough right in our hands. Quick! You, Solomon, keep those hands up—"

Madeleine darted past him. Harden was transformed. In his eyes gleamed desperation, exultation, the harsh menace of death.

"You damned little rat!" he said, low-voiced, and advanced to Solomon, shoving the pistol against his body, reaching out with the other hand, searching him. "No gun, eh? Well, we'd sooner have you than any one else. How'd you learn about this? Speak up, damn you!"

Solomon chuckled. "Mr. Billings told us a mortal lot, sir," he rejoined apologetically. "And 'e ain't in no 'ospital at all. No, sir, Mr. Billings is a laying in me own 'ouse this werry minute."

Harden exploded in a vitriolic curse. "So that's it? Well, you've slipped up! One thing he didn't know was the get-

away; and we'll fix you, mister!" From the hall came a quick, thin whistle. The pistol jerked. "Step out ahead of me. March, or I swear I'll blow hell out of you. March!"

Solomon, helpless, obeyed the menace. They stepped out into the hall. Harden gripped him by the nape of the neck and hurled him into the opposite doorway. Madeleine was holding the door open. She swiftly closed it, shot a bolt.

"Got him!" cried Harden. "Quick, girl, go ahead! One yell out of you, Solomon, and you get drilled. March!"

The three passed into the next room and were gone.

CHAPTER VII.

SETTLING ACCOUNTS.

THE Place Vendôme was its usual bustling self, and nobody observed three people who emerged from one of the old courtyard entrances between shops, and entered a waiting car. The lady got in first; the two men, arm in arm, were not remarked; the door closed and the car darted away and was lost in the traffic stream.

It swept around, circled the Place de l'Opéra, shot out the Boulevard Haussmann to the Etoile, and presently swooped down the sharp hill past the Trocadéro to the Seine. Then, at the Pont de Grenelle, it slid off through Auteuil and two minutes later was passing the high iron gates of the Villa Montmorenci—that cluster of houses in private grounds which forms one of the most secluded spots in all Paris. The car slowed down before a crumbling old house in a corner of the grounds, passed a lodge at whose door a man stood at attention, and halted.

This was the house in which Dick North lay helpless.

Harden escorted his prisoner into the house. Madeleine paused and turned to the chauffeur.

"We will be in the salon, Emile. Go and get M. North and bring him. If necessary, use handcuffs; that man may have to be tamed."

Emile saluted and the car circled the house. Madeleine went in, and joined Harden and John Solomon in the salon.

"Sit down," snapped Harden. "Madeleine, watch him." He picked up his desk telephone and gave a number. "Who's in charge there to-day?" he inquired when the response came. "Well, you can wire Dominetti that I've got Solomon right here under my gun. Any orders out regarding him? Oh! All right. Then change the wire to read that he's dead; he will be in five minutes. All right."

Solomon listened to all this without any expression showing in his face. His placid blue eyes were unwinking. He fished for his knife and plug, and began to shred tobacco into his palm. Harden opened his desk and produced his silenced automatic from the drawer.

"Well, big boy," Harden said jocosely, "you've run a grand little bluff on Dominetti, huh? But your string's played out. What's all this bunk about you and Pearson having some sort of a death ray—eh?"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," said Solomon, "it ain't bunk. That there is a werry scientific fact, as the old gent said when 'e kissed the 'ousemaid."

"You're nuts," said Harden in contempt. "If you had such a thing, you'd pull all kinds of tricks with it. I know all about you. You're a fat little fool

with more money than brains, and you have sense enough to hire brains. Well, you're finished."

"Yes, sir?" said Solomon, tamping his pipe. Madeleine stood at one side, holding a small pistol. "Beggin' your pardon, sir and miss, I'd be werry glad to 'ave a settlin' of me accounts, if so be as you don't mind. That 'ere Arab you went and killed last night—'e was a werry good man, Mr. Harden, and sorry I was to see 'im murdered."

Harden laughed harshly, his eyes fastened on Solomon.

"Know about it, huh? What's all this bosh about accounts?"

"Me accounts, sir and miss—'ere they be, all shipshape and Bristol fashion," said Solomon. His hand went to his pocket, regardless of the silenced revolver that darted up at him. He produced a small red notebook, and, with an apologetic air, laid it on the desk. "If you'll 'ave the kindness, sir and miss. Prowidence is a werry mysterious thing, Mr. Harden, and I'm mortal sorry for you and this 'ere poor misguided female—"

"Shut your trap," snapped Harden. "Madeleine, look at that book. Watch out for tricks."

Harden kept his eyes and weapon steadily on Solomon. Madeleine, putting her pistol on the desk, picked up the notebook, a disdainful smile on her lips. She opened it, turned a page or two.

Her smile became frozen. Her eyes dilated, and across her face stole a mortal pallor. Whatever this woman was, whatever her past had been, in this moment one could feel only a pity not untinged with horror. Her face contracted, and suddenly she dropped the notebook and clutched at the desk, and stared at Solomon with terrible eyes.

"You damned fool!" said Harden in amazement. He put out one hand and took the notebook. "One move from you, Solomon, and you're done for."

"Yes, sir," said Solomon placidly, and held a match to his pipe. "Only it's you as is done for, Mr. Harden—just like that."

HARDEN laughed. He opened the little red book, glanced at it, and a change came into his face. Upon his lips burst an oath of rage. He flung down the book and swept up the silenced automatic, aiming at Solomon. His eyes were narrow, vindictive, terrible in their determination.

"You rat!" he said slowly. "Take it, then—"

A voice broke in upon him from the doorway.

"Up with 'em, Harden! Up!"

North was standing there. In one hand he held a frightful object—a poker of iron and brass, from which slow drops of red fell to the carpet. Emile had come upon him as he wakened again from that deathly sleep. In the other hand North held an automatic pistol.

"Drop that gun—drop it!" rang out his voice. Harden's hand laid down his automatic and drew back along the desk. He stared at the newcomer as though petrified. A low sobbing groan broke from Madeleine. "Up" commanded North, and took a step forward.

With the rapidity of light Madeleine snatched her own pistol from the desk, fired twice. Harden's hand leaped to his weapon; the silenced *chug-chug-chug* of its viperous shots sounded queerly amid the crashes of blasting reports. Then Harden sagged forward a little and a rush of blood broke from his lips.

Madeleine screamed horribly—the scream of a mad beast, instinct with rage, with fury, with a mortal hurt. She made a leap toward North; as she did so, Harden's finger, convulsive in death, pressed the trigger of his weapon twice. The woman spun around—both bullets had smashed into her body. As she collapsed, Harden's head fell forward on the desk.

John Solomon put one finger in his pipe and tamped it calmly. He had not moved.

North's hand let his weapon fall. Very white, he caught the curtain at the doorway, gripped it to him, held himself erect. Behind him was a rush of feet, a shrill medley of voices. He half turned, swayed, then slowly his hand slipped on the curtain folds and he sank down.

"Solomon Effendi!"

Dark men, half a dozen of them, burst into the room.

JOHN SOLOMON, pudgy, placid as ever, sat beside North's bed and carefully cut off tobacco from a very new, black and shiny plug of T & B, and loaded his clay pipe.

"You're a werry lucky young man, sir, that's all I got to say," he observed calmly. "That 'ere drug is about wore off, but bullets don't wear off so good."

"Listen to me a minute," said North, coming to one elbow. "I don't understand a lot of things—you couldn't have known that I'd show up at the right moment! If you got hold of Billings and made him talk, and spoiled their whole game, then why did you let yourself get trapped?"

"I couldn't rightly 'elp it," and Solomon's eyes twinkled. "Besides which, I 'ave a mortal lot o' trust in Prowidence, sir; and I 'ave me own ways of reaching me own ends. So when I knowed as 'ow that 'ere Dupont 'ad caught you, I went and caught that 'ere Billings, and I wasn't mistook in trusting of Prowidence. Now, sir, this 'ere is a sleeping draft the doctor left for you."

"Hold on," said North. "See here—how did you get hold of me in the first place? Remember when we met in the Tuileries Gardens? Was that an accident or not?"

"Them as asks questions, sir, gets less 'n they asks, says I," and Solomon chuckled. "Accidents 'ave a werry queer way of 'appening to me, sir, they 'ave that! As a matter o' fact, I'd been on your trail ever since 'earing o' that there matter down in Libya. When I likes a man, I likes 'im werry much indeed, as the 'ousemaid said when the old gent up and kissed 'er. You and me can 'ave a trip to Rome, Mr. North, and you can go back to Libya—"

"I stick with you, if you want me," said North, and smiled.

John Solomon put out a hand and gave North a surprisingly firm grip.

"Werry 'appy I am to 'ear you say so." Solomon put down his pipe. "Now you take this 'ere drink, sir."

North swallowed the potion—and this, so far as he was concerned, ended the story

THE END.

But—the story is not ended!

What was this mysterious "Death Ray?" What were those remarkable pictures on a blank wall? Who was Dominetti? These queries and a dozen more will be answered in the longest and best John Solomon story ever written—"John Solomon's Biggest Game"—a book-length novel soon to appear in the ARGOSY. *You will see John pitted against all the forces of destruction, with the fate of half the civilized world hanging in the balance; and the little blue-eyed cockney coming face to face with defeat—the glorious defeat that has made the sagas and hero-stories of the world an inspiration to following generations.*

"You have my telephone number and you'd be surprised how often I have a free evening"

A Great Man's Shoes

Fighting to hold the crown of financial power that has fallen on his unprepared head, Bill Robinson battles disloyalty and business wolves

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "Run, Dan, Run!" "The Mental Marvel," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM ROBINSON was twenty-seven when he inherited his kingdom in 1931. A bomb hurled into his father's office had killed William Robinson, senior, and his three partners, Jenks, Moore, and Evans.

Lewis Reach, the attorney of Robinson and Company, tells Bill what he is facing. On the one hand, he can liquidate the billion or so in stocks owned by the company, for a few millions—for it is a holding company, owning shares in dozens of industries, and much of the stock has been put up as collateral to buy other stocks, "pyramiding." Robinson and Company was the nation's greatest financial power, but quick liquidation would crash all these stock values.

On the other hand, he can carry on his father's policies, with every big financier fighting him; and, in all probability, he will end by losing everything. But, Reach says, the bomb explosion was not an anarchist outrage; he is sure that some of Robinson's business rivals, desperate, had put him and his partners out of the way to end their power.

This story began in the Argosy for January 18.

Bill determines to fight. Reach's warning that he can trust nobody is borne out when John Redding, Robinson's chief lieutenant, leaves the company to become president of the New York and Transcontinental Railroad. This is owned by Enoch Eastingham, Robinson's chief rival in the attempt to gain control of air and rail transportation.

Bill sends for a classmate, Irving R. Smith, assistant professor in the Harvard School of Business Administration. He wants Smith to digest business reports and advise him on business fundamentals; he knows that the decisions and policies must be his own. Smith, en route to New York, meets Margaret Eastingham, Enoch's niece.

John Redding tries to take his secretary, Jane Gregg, away from Robinson and Company, but finds her loyal; and he arouses her suspicions when he asks her to bring him a letter file from his office closet—a file which, he claims, contains only personal letters.

CHAPTER VII.

BUSINESS WAR.

IRVING SMITH entered the office of the head of the firm without knocking. Bill had insisted that there should be no formalities between them. Mr. Robinson was sitting in his shirt sleeves, feet on the shelf of his desk, and scowling at a report from the Phœnix Coal Mining Corporation. He looked up with a shame-faced grin.

"I know who invented cryptograms," Bill declared. "It was an auditor. I've been over this three times and even studied it upside down and all I know is that this company has assets of $12,376,232.11, and liabilities which are exactly the same, even to the eleven cents. How is it possible? I can understand everything except its working out to eleven cents."

"You poor simpleton," laughed the professor, "that's just bookkeeping technique. Both sides of a ledger must balance. They reach it by adding the profits to the liabilities or vice versa, meaning adding the loss to the assets. The Phœnix company made a profit of $1,921,432 last year."

"What a fool I was to drag you away from Harvard," declared Bill.

"Your tenth assistant bookkeeper could have explained that to you."

"Ah, but what would my tenth assistant bookkeeper think of his employer if he displayed such abysmal ignorance? What you think is a matter of indifference to me, Smithie," Bill grinned.

"Well, lay this aside. Do you know anything about R. W. Powell, president of the Southern and Western Railroad?"

"Except that he is a pompous-looking johnny with a mean eye, nothing in the world."

"Well, I've just read a letter from him in which he urges you to pass the dividend on the Southern and Western —not to pay the regular dividend this time. He incloses a statement to justify his suggestion. I have been over the statement. It looks to me as if it had been jockeyed to make a bad showing. He has charged off a ridiculous percentage to depreciation. I've been over his reports for five years and this year he has trebled the depreciation written off the books last year and the year before, and doubled it over the previous years. He did this in the face of heavy expenditure two years ago for new rolling stock and roadbed over twenty per cent of the line. Cutting the depreciation charge in halves, I find earnings

over expenditures which justifies a dividend and leaves an ample surplus."

"What's the matter with the old donkey, then?"

"I'm sure I don't know. When a railroad passes a dividend it is usually followed by a big slump in the value of its securities."

"Now you're talking my language. Give me a telegraph blank."

"What are you going to do?"

"Order him to pay the dividend and wire his resignation immediately."

"But that's high-handed. I may be in error or he may be overcautious. After all, conservatism ought to be applauded instead of condemned," protested Smithie, who turned pale.

"I may be a bum bookkeeper, but I can smell a rat," replied Bill. "Old Powell is a crook. He's sold out to the opposition. I'm going to can every executive who does anything that strikes you as queer. What impudence he had to treble the percentage for depreciation on us! What the heck is the percentage for depreciation anyway?"

Smithie had to laugh. "It's the decrease in value of the property due to wear and tear. And he may be right."

"If there is money enough to pay a dividend, you bet your life it gets paid. This is a scheme to bear the stock on the Exchange, to run the price down and make me spend a million supporting it. And the immediate discharge of this old trimmer will throw a scare into any more time-serving executives I may have. I've got to act high-handed, Smithie. This onion, Powell, breezed into the office the first day I took charge. Said he was on a flying trip to New York to make some purchases of supplies and took advantage of the opportunity to pay his respects. What he came in for was to get a look at me and see if it was safe to sell me out. His error was in letting me get a look at him. Somebody in this joint must know the first vice president's name. I'll wire him to come in to see me, and if I don't like him I'll send for the second vice president. I may have to make a conductor president of that road, but I'll get an honest man."

"WELL, I'm glad I don't have to make such decisions," Smith sighed.

"You stick to the language of figures, feller. I'll take a chance on your judgment every time."

"I hesitate—"

"Bah! This is the first chance I've had to show that there is somebody on the job in Robinson's. And while you're here cast your beautiful orbs over this sweet missive. One of our small stockholders received it and mailed it in with his proxy on Medford Motors."

Smith picked up a circular letter and read it with increasing indignation. It ran as follows:

DEAR SIR:

The annual meeting of Medford Motors takes place in the office of Robinson and Company in New York City in four weeks. Please read this letter carefully in your own interests.

There are 100,000 shares of Medford Motors issued, all common stock and voting. Par value ten dollars. Quoted on the New York Stock Exchange at $35.00 per share. Of the total issue Robinson and Company owns or controls only twenty-five thousand shares. Due to your apathy, this minority interest has elected your officers and directed your policy for eight years. It is true that you have profited greatly thereby, due to the financial genius of the late William Robinson and his partners, all of whom met a lamentable death in the recent bomb outrage in New York.

William Robinson, junior, a youth of 27 years, with no business experience whatever, has assumed control of his father's business and will undoubtedly try to continue his management of Medford Motors. Need we point out to you that the future of the company is in jeopardy? A great business requires expert management. Consider the fate of rival companies which have been mismanaged.

You can regain control of your company by exercising your right to vote. We urge you to attend the meeting in person, or, if that is impossible, send proxies for your stock interests to the undersigned. You may be assured that the company is in excellent financial condition and under proper management will increase in prosperity.

You must decide yourself whether you wish to see your stock selling within a year at fifty or sixty or dropping to five or ten, due to the suspension of dividends. You know the reputation of the Eastingham interests for able management of motor corporations.

Just sign the inclosed form and look after the welfare of yourself and your family. Signed,

ENOCH EASTINGHAM.

"Your girl-friend's uncle, the old crocodile," commented Bill. "What do you suggest doing about this?"

"Is it true that you have only twenty-five per cent of the stock?"

"Probably. What makes me mad is the way the old crook has jumped in to turn my father's death to his advantage. I've got to lick him. No doubt he's trying for proxies of other companies as well."

"It's very ingenious. No doubt he'll get a lot of proxies."

"No doubt he's got them. And he probably bought a lot when the stock went off five points after the tragedy. The bird who wrote me has only ten shares. They're coming from all sides, Smithie. Wish I hadn't gone to college, but had come into dad's office."

"In which case you would have been in the room with him when the bomb exploded," said Smithie significantly. "Why not let this company go without a fight? Is it important?"

"Yes. It's in airplane manufacturing in a small way. We can't let it go."

"WHY don't you start buying the stock at once?" Smith inquired.

"I'm suspicious that old Eastingham expects us to do that. Otherwise he would not have signed that circular. He knows we'll get a copy from somebody. And Reach tells me he probably works in the dark."

"Can you find out who are the big stockholders?"

"Sure. We have the company's books with a list of them."

"Then you have a big advantage over Eastingham. Five or six stockholders may have another twenty-five thousand shares. We'll call on them personally and ask for their proxies. The outfit who are running the company must be efficient or the stock wouldn't be so valuable. Big stockholders would be willing to join us to keep them in office."

"But these officers may have sold out to Eastingham."

Smith laughed. "I think you'll find more honest men in business than you imagine. I agree with you it's a mistake to enter a buying competition with Eastingham. He may be after some other concern and wants you to expend your resources saving Medford Motors."

"I feel like a blind man. Answer the phone, will you?"

Smith got on the phone.

"Miss Jane Gregg, one of your stenographers, would like an interview on a most important matter."

"Eh? Jane Gregg. Oh, that's the pretty girl I spoke to last night. Tell 'em to send her in."

He picked up his coat, thrust his arms through it, and drew up his chair to the desk, where he assumed the pose of a busy business man which was so ingenuous that the professor chuckled.

"I realize that she must be a very pretty girl," was his comment.

"I didn't get a really good look at her," replied Bill. "But you wouldn't have me receive a lady in my shirt sleeves."

"Most business men do."

Jane Gregg entered rather diffidently. She wore a black cloth skirt and jacket and a cream waist buttoned high on the neck. She also wore a narrow black four-in-hand. She looked trim and exceedingly neat and much prettier than Bill had supposed her to be last night. There was a touch of crimson in her olive cheeks, and her black eyes were shining with excitement.

"Glad to see you, Miss Gregg," said Bill, rising. "This is my associate, Professor Smith. If you wish to see me alone I'll send him on an errand."

She smiled in friendly fashion at Smith. "I'm sure you will both want to hear what I have to say, sir."

"Well, take a chair, Miss Gregg. Take this one. Those auditors been taking unfair advantage of you?"

"Oh, no, it's not that, Mr. Robinson. It's something which I happened to run across which I thought you would wish to know about."

"And very much obliged to you. Sit right down here and let us in on it, whatever it is."

Jane seated herself and then she didn't know how to begin. "I guess—probably you didn't know it, but I acted as secretary to Mr. Redding until he left the company recently. Since then I have been working with the auditors."

"You were Redding's secretary? I'm surprised he didn't take you with him. He told me he was going into business for himself."

"Well, as a matter of fact, he invited me to dinner last night and wanted to make me his secretary. He is the new president of the New York and Transcontinental Railroad."

"LISTEN to that, Smithie," commanded Bill. "That's an Eastingham property. Redding went right over to the opposition!"

"That's what I told him," she stated. "So I refused."

"That was darn nice of you, Miss Gregg. I bet he offered you more money."

"That isn't why I came in to see you, Mr. Robinson."

"Well, it was a darn good reason. How much did he offer you?"

"Seventy-five dollars a week at first and then eighty-five."

"Make a note of that, Smith. We don't want Miss Gregg to suffer for her loyalty to the firm."

"No, please," she exclaimed, coloring vividly. "I'm just a stenographer-secretary here, and the maximum is fifty dollars, which I am receiving. I was to be Mr. Redding's private secretary."

"Well, you'll be Professor Smith's, so that's all right. I'd make you mine, only I have already appointed Miss Nevin. Much rather have you."

Jane laughed. "You don't seem in the least like a great executive."

Bill laughed. "Between you and and me, I'm a fake. But I'm doing the best I can. Eighty-five simoleons is your salary, and little enough. Ziegfeld would give you twice that."

"Thanks," she said dryly, and Bill suddenly felt small. "May I tell you why I asked to see you?"

"Shoot."

"Mr. Redding felt a bit diffident about coming into these offices under the circumstances, and he asked me to take from his closet a letter file containing personal correspondence which he had forgotten to remove when he left us. I saw no reason why I shouldn't oblige him."

"Why not? It was his property."

"Well, I said I'd send it by messenger, and he said he would rather meet me this noon and receive it personally. I thought that rather queer."

"I don't," said Bill with a grin. "Redding wanted to see you again."

"Well, I thought it queer, and then he insisted that I wrap it up so it wouldn't attract attention. I agreed."

"Well?" demanded Robinson, whose interest was fifty per cent the narrative and fifty per cent the girl.

"I thought it over during the night. I never admired Mr. Redding much, and I was rather disgusted when he walked out on the firm immediately after the catastrophe, when he should have remained and helped the new management, so I—well, I had no right to, of course, but I decided to look through the letter file before I delivered it to him."

"Good girl!" exclaimed Bill.

"I came in early this morning, found the letter file and went through it. Its contents were mostly personal correspondence dating back two or three years, but I found this memo from your father in his handwriting, and, while I don't exactly understand it, I thought you would wish to see it."

She opened her hand bag and took out a folded letter sheet. She rose and handed it to Bill. He spread out the sheet and recognized the familiar script of his murdered parent, and bent his head to conceal his agitation.

The date was June 10, two days before the bomb outrage. His father had evidently scribbled the memo, thrust it in an office envelope, and sent a secretary to deliver it to Redding. It ran:

> I understand that Sam Bates is in New York. Find out what he's up to. Employ detectives if necessary. Report as soon as possible. W. R.

"Who is Sam Bates?" asked Robinson. "Do you know, Miss Gregg?"

"No, sir."

"What makes you think this memo is important?"

"I don't know if it is, Mr. Robinson. It was a communication from your father. He wanted an immediate report, and authorized Mr. Redding to engage detectives. That made me think that this Mr. Bates couldn't be a very reputable person, and he was evidently some sort of menace to the firm."

"What did Redding do about it?"

"Nothing, so far as I know. At least he didn't do any telephoning in my hearing, and he dictated nothing concerning him."

"I CAN tell you something about Samuel Bates," said Smith. "He's been in the public press considerably. He used to be a stunt aviator, and then he promoted a line of transatlantic passenger planes which never amounted to anything. There was some talk of prosecuting him five years ago. The last I heard of him he claimed to have invented an airplane which would take the air without the preliminary run along the ground."

"How the deuce do you know things like this?"

"I read the newspapers carefully. It's part of my job."

"Well, Miss Gregg, I'm greatly obliged to you," said Robinson. "You may have done the firm an important service. Anyway, you used your head, and that justifies your promotion. Move your things into the vacant desk outside Mr. Smith's office."

"About the letter file. Shall I deliver it?"

"Yes. I'll keep this memo, though."

"Wait a minute, Bill," suggested the professor. "Make a copy of that letter and put the original back in the file."

"Why?"

"Because Redding knows its contents. It's my opinion he wanted the file to lay hands on that memo. Let him have it."

"Right, Socrates. I get you."

He scratched off a copy of the note and returned the original to the girl.

"Was this hidden in the letter file?" he asked.

"No, sir; just laid inside the cover."

"Well, put it back in the same place. Observe his attitude when you hand it to him. If he opens the package at once and looks to see if this letter is still there, I'd like to know about it."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Miss Gregg. I'll be greatly obliged if you'll keep your eyes and ears open around the office. I'm greatly handicapped by the apparent ignorance of our staff as to our operations before the tragedy. My father's secretary was killed, and either the secretaries of his partners are unusually dumb or they don't want to tell me anything. Two of them are leaving us on Saturday. Resigned."

"I—I think they are contemptible," declared the girl angrily.

"Oh, I imagine they are following what seems to be the first rule of business, bettering themselves. Which makes me appreciate your attitude all the more."

Flushing with pleasure, Miss Gregg rose and left the office. She was walking on air. In the first place, being a woman, she was aware that she had made an agreeable impression on her employer; and in the next place she was going to possess, for the first time in her life, an ample income, to which she had entitled herself by loyal service. She half wished that Mr. Robinson had made her his secretary, but Mr. Smith was rather nice, too, and she had secured a wonderful promotion. Redding? Humph! She was glad she had opened that letter file. She would like to throw it at him instead of handing it to him, the big complacent pig!

As soon as they were alone, Robinson picked up the letter and read it a second time. "I don't see what interest dad could have had in an ex-stunt aviator and crooked promoter, do you?"

Smith shook his head. "He was evidently very anxious to learn his business in New York."

"That's a girl in a thousand for you, Smithie. The first sign of *esprit de corps* I've discovered in this aquariumful of sharks and mackerel. She is sharp as a steel trap and loyal as they make them. Now, as I figure it out, Redding laid this memo in his personal file for some reason. I wouldn't think much about it save for his anxiety to get possession of the file. Apparently he didn't do anything about investigating Bates. A good

man would have jumped on the phone as soon as he got his instructions, in which case Miss Gregg would know something about it. I think Mr. Redding is a snake in the grass."

"Well, you're rid of him. We had better find out about Bates ourselves."

"The devil of it is I don't know who to ask. I'll call in the office manager. He may know something." Bill picked up the phone. "Send in Mr. Mason, please."

"What do you think of Mason?"

"He looks all right. I think he'll tell you anything he knows."

Mason entered a moment later. He was a heavily built man of forty, with a small brown mustache and a pair of rather sleepy-looking brown eyes. He seemed nervous as he entered. The staff of Robinson and Company were all nervous, as a matter of fact, for it hadn't taken long for the word to get around that the new boss didn't know what he was about.

"Sit down, Mr. Mason," Bill said cordially. "I want you to tell me what you know of Samuel Bates."

"You mean the Bates who is president of Consolidated Express Airways?"

"The same," Bill hazarded.

"Why, I don't know anything about him except that, when we secured control of his company a few months ago, he was very anxious to remain in office."

"Ever see him?"

"No, sir."

"Have we had correspondence with him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please send it into me."

"I'm sorry, sir; but the Bates file was in your father's possession when —er—"

"I know, I know. That's all, Mr. Mason."

When he had gone, Robinson glanced significantly at his friend.

"Dad was going over his correspondence with this Bates at the time of— And he had asked Redding to find out what he was doing in New York. And you tell me that he was mixed up in some queer proceedings. It's a cinch father wouldn't keep a man like that in office."

"I was thinking the very same thing."

"Well, we'd better put detectives upon the trail of Samuel Bates. Get hold of Blank's Agency and see what they can discover. If it turns out that he had anything to do with the crime—" Bill choked on the word. "I'm lunching with Reach, and I'll find out as much as I can about Consolidated Airways. It's a big concern, isn't it?"

"Operates a hundred planes from Chicago to the coast, I believe," Smith said.

"Good heavens, and I don't know an airplane engine from a fuselage, whatever that is. Is my hair turning gray, Smithie?"

"No signs of it yet."

"By the way, your salary as my personal secretary is twenty-five thousand dollars a year."

"Preposterous! Ten thousand would be too much."

"Smithie, it's worth the difference to be able to talk freely to you. Shut up. I'll have you elected vice president as soon as I can call a meeting of the board of directors. Reach and I hold all the offices at present."

"Well," said Smith, "it's a far cry from assistant professor at Harvard to vice president of Robinson and Company. I'll try to bear up."

"Your immediate job is to go after Bates."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

PROFESSOR SMITH, wearing a new dinner suit, entered the apartment building in which Enoch Eastingham resided, at seven thirty the following evening. He felt some trepidation. In the week which had just elapsed he had made no effort to follow up the acquaintance so auspiciously begun with Margaret Eastingham, because Bill Robinson had informed him that she was the niece of his chief enemy; but he couldn't put the red-haired girl with the green eyes completely out of his mind. Smith was not particularly susceptible; blondes and brunettes left him cold—but there was something about the young woman who had usurped his sleeping car berth which intrigued him.

Upon returning to the office after putting Blank's Agency upon the job of investigating Bates, he had found a large square envelope addressed in a feminine hand which was unknown to him. In truth it had been several years since he was familiar with any feminine handwriting. He opened it curiously and found within a little note:

> DEAR PROFESSOR SMITH:
>
> If you have forgotten the incident of the sleeping car, I have not. I have been expecting a call from you in vain. Now I am bold enough to invite you to dinner to-morrow night. I hope you can come. My uncle is anxious to meet you and thank you for the service you have done me. Please drop me a line if you won't be able to come to-morrow night. Otherwise I shall expect you. Dinner at seven-thirty. As there will be other guests, better wear evening dress. Yours truly,
>
> MARGARET EASTINGHAM.

The missive gave Smith a curious palpitation in the region of the heart. It pained him to think that he would have to refuse. After a moment's consideration he carried it into Robinson and asked his decision.

"Go, by all means," advised Bill. "Her uncle wants to thank you and give you the once-over. Well, you'll have a chance to size the old boy up for us. I've seen him at a distance, but have never spoken to him. He may be responsible for the bomb; at least he is the chief beneficiary."

"I'll be darn glad to go. I like that girl."

"Well, just don't let her play Delilah to your Samson. I'd like your opinion of the old man. Of course he knows you are working with me. Maybe he'd like to buy you off the way he bought Redding."

"A fat chance!"

"I know it, old man. But grab this opportunity, Smithie. Who knows what may come out of it?"

So Smith put on his new clothes and entered the castle of the enemy. He looked very well in evening dress, tall, slim, graceful and striking. His bone spectacles rather improved his appearance, giving a scholarly cast to his too-youthful countenance.

Standing at the telephone desk as he entered was another man in evening dress who was calling the Eastingham apartment.

"Please announce Mr. Samuel Bates," the stranger was directing.

Smith threw an astonished glance at the man he had been asked to investigate. He saw a person who might have been forty-five or thirty-five, who

had jet black hair, a long nose, and what would be called in the prize ring an "iron jaw."

Bates was about five feet eight inches tall, finely proportioned, with broad shoulders and slender waist. His hands were big and hairy, and his skin was dark but clear. He turned and inspected Smith as he stepped up to the operator and asked for Eastingham and lifted bushy black eyebrows when he heard his name.

"ARE you Smith of Robinson's?" he demanded. His voice was rather harsh and heavy.

"Yes, sir, I am."

Bates put out a big hand. "Glad to know you. I'm a Robinson man, myself. President of Consolidated Airways. Office in Chicago."

"I'm very glad to make your acquaintance," replied Smith equivocally. He met a pair of piercing black eyes. Bates had a bold face, a daredevil type; and in the opinion of the professor, here was a man who wasn't bothered with scruples.

"You're the expert the kid picked from Harvard to help him fill the old man's shoes," said Bates with a rather rude laugh. The fellow had fine white teeth.

"I think it will be discovered that Mr. Robinson's feet are large enough," Smith replied stiffly.

"You gentlemen are expected, and you are to go right up to the eleventh floor," put in the operator.

"I certainly hope so," replied Bates heartily. "Looks like an *entente cordiale* when two Robinson men dine with Enoch Eastingham."

"I do not know the gentleman. I happened to have met Miss Eastingham, who asked me to dinner tonight."

Bates's cordiality vanished. "Yeah? You're a friend of Margaret's, are you? She never mentioned you to me."

"Indeed?" Smith met his hostile eye with one equally defiant. This brute acted as though he were exceedingly friendly with Miss Eastingham. Well, he hadn't liked him anyway.

They ascended to the eleventh floor without further conversation. Smith kept his eyes front, but didn't fail to read correctly the sneer on the lip of his companion. It was a man of action's contempt for a scholar.

They left the lift with Bates in advance. The Eastingham butler was waiting for them and conducted them into the apartment. Smith had never had an opportunity to inspect the de luxe residences of the great Park Avenue apartment houses and his eyes blinked behind his spectacles with astonishment, for he was entering a mansion inside a hotel building.

They stood in a large hallway at the right of which was a flight of marble stairs ascending to a second floor, upon the landing of which stood a suit of silver armor. Through a wide door at the left he looked into an enormous salon, the walls of which were hung with Gobelin tapestries, the floor of which was strewn with priceless Bokharas, and the high ceiling was either a reproduction or the original of the ceiling of the great hall of a Florentine palace.

The butler announced their names and, from a group at the far end of the room, Margaret emerged. She wore a green and gold costume which set off her red hair and her white satin skin superbly. There was an entrancing smile on her face and her right hand was outstretched.

"Hello, Sam," she said cheerfully.

"Professor Smith, I'm delighted that you were able to come. I want you to meet everybody. Shift for yourself, Sam."

There was a scowl upon the face of the former stunt aviator as she took Smith's arm and led him toward the group.

"This is my uncle," she declared. "Doesn't he look like one of those old Venetian doges? Professor Smith, Uncle Enoch."

Eastingham's ascetic face cracked in what he supposed to be a smile of welcome.

"How do, professor?" he croaked. "Margaret told me all about you. Sort of dirty trick she played on you."

"Not at all. I was overjoyed to be of service."

"She's been putting things over on the male sex all her life."

"That's enough of that," declared Margaret saucily. "I want to introduce Professor Smith: Mrs. Gerard, Mrs. Grew, Miss Jennings; and Mr. Gerard."

Smithie bowed to two middle-aged women too youthfully dressed and wearing too many jewels and to a slim, pretty young girl with black hair bobbed like a boy's who wore a white satin dress into which she seemed to have been melted.

BATES had joined them. Shaking hands with Enoch Eastingham, he proceeded to monopolize the dark girl. Margaret drew Smith to one side.

"Well," she said reproachfully. "Why didn't you call me up?"

"I wanted to," he replied. "But I hated to presume upon your kindness, and I stepped into so much work that I have been swamped."

"Oh, I know about that. Uncle has talked you over with various friends in my hearing. Most of them were highly amused to think of pitchforking a college professor into control of a great business, but uncle says that Robinson showed more sense than he gave him credit for. He has a great respect for education."

"I'm not in control of Mr. Robinson's business. Anything but that! Bill runs his own shop. I'm a sort of confidant and friend, that's all."

"Well, I forgive you for forgetting me."

"I assure you I didn't forget you."

This conversation, which was much more absorbing than it sounds, was interrupted by the announcement that dinner was served. Smith was rather surprised that no cocktails had been offered, but Eastingham looked as though he might be a prohibitionist.

"You're to take me in," said Margaret. "Ignore the black looks from Sam Bates. He thinks he's in love with me."

"Have you known him long?" asked Smith in a low tone.

"Oh, for a year or so. He's really a wonderful person. A daring aviator, you know, and a clever business man. He is considered irresistible with women."

"And do you resist him?" he had the impudence to ask.

She laughed. "I'm still single, aren't I?"

They entered a cozy dining room done in Flemish oak and were seated at a round table. Smithie found Mrs. Gerard on his left, with Eastingham beyond her; Mrs. Grew was on the other side of Eastingham, Mr. Gerard beside her, then Miss Jennings and then Bates, who thus sat on the other side of Margaret, whom he immediately engaged in conversation.

The professor talked to Mrs. Gerard, who was good-natured and rather amusing, but after a few moments Eastingham leaned forward and addressed him directly.

"I hope you have told Robinson that he's a fool not to liquidate his business," he said sharply.

"I wouldn't presume to tell Bill that he was a fool, sir."

"What's his idea in trying to carry on, may I ask?"

"He believes that his father would have desired it."

"Humph!" snorted Enoch. "Poor old Robinson must be turning over in his grave."

"If there is enough of him to turn over," scoffed Bates. The airman was aware by the dead silence that he had committed a grave error. Eastingham threw a ferocious scowl at him, Mrs. Gerard drew in her breath sharply and Margaret uttered an exclamation of indignation.

"I think you forget yourself, Sam," she said in a low tone.

"I certainly beg your pardon," Bates mumbled. He grew very red.

Smith with difficulty refrained from making an angry retort.

"Such a horrible, horrible crime," muttered Miss Jennings.

"As I was saying," Eastingham continued, "Robinson could dispose of his interests most advantageously, but it takes an extraordinary man and one with a life's training to operate successfully in a big way. The boy will be bankrupt in six months."

"Now that the professor has heard your views, uncle," said Margaret blandly, "please change the subject. Let's talk of something agreeable like music or literature." She turned to Smith. **"Have you written any books, Professor Smith?"**

"A few textbooks, nothing of consequence," he replied gratefully.

THE conversation became general and innocuous, but Enoch Eastingham took no part in it. He ate almost nothing and seemed in a brown study. Occasionally he cast an appraising glance at Smith and patently ignored Bates. The latter began to whisper to Margaret, but she turned her shoulder to him, so he talked in low tones to the girl he had taken in to dinner.

Smith enjoyed the proximity of Margaret Eastingham and was content to exchange remarks with her now and then. She told the story of their meeting to the table at large in such an amusing manner that there was a shriek of laughter when she arrived at the climax, the porter's statement that she had the right berth but the wrong railroad, and she imitated the negro dialect deliciously.

She had some insidious and bewitching perfume which almost intoxicated Professor Smith. He was sorry when dinner was over and they returned to the big room. He was more sorry when Bates cornered Margaret and Eastingham laid a clawlike hand upon his sleeve.

"Come into my study," said his host. "I'd like a little chat with you."

Perforce he had to follow old Enoch into a small room which opened off the main salon.

"Sit down, sir," invited the magnate. "Want a smoke? Don't indulge, myself."

"I'll take a cigarette if you don't mind," said Smith.

"I'm going to talk turkey to you, boy," announced Eastingham. "I never liked William Robinson, but I have nothing against his son."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Smith, quite unconvinced.

"Old Robinson was an octopus," declared Eastingham, who reminded Smith of a spider. "He didn't believe in the doctrine of 'live and let live.' I do. Robinson tried to create a monopoly of mines, railroads and motors," Eastingham went on. "I fought him. So did a lot of other fellows. If he had lived he probably would have licked us. Died a horrible death. I regret it. These anarchists must be suppressed. Ought to put every one of them in jail!

"Right now the future of the transportation world is in the air. Any fool knows that. Five years ago the Pennsylvania Railroad recognized it and went in for aviation. In ten years nobody will buy a railroad ticket except for short trips. You can't monopolize the air. Robinson thought he could. I know better. Robinson went after everything in sight. Hog, that's what he was. Left everything at sixes and sevens. Fool son thinks he can jump in and carry out father's plans. You know better, don't you?"

"I really—I have no right to discuss my employer's affairs."

"The boy will go broke. It's a cinch to bust him. There's a combination arranged which will break him wide open. Much better to make an equitable arrangement. He can get out now with enough to buy yachts and women and wine and every fool thing he wants. What in heck *does* he want?"

"Chiefly to catch his father's murderers," said Smith curtly.

"All right. Let the police attend to it. Their job. What's it got to do with business?"

"Bill has an idea that his father and his partners were killed by business opponents," said Smith indiscreetly. "He doesn't propose to let his father's enemies profit by the crime."

"Eh? Business men don't throw bombs! Obviously an anarchist plot. Likely to happen to me—to anybody who has money."

"Nevertheless Bill is determined to remain in business," said Smith firmly.

"Well, you've got sense. You claim to have studied business methods. You know he's licked, don't you?"

"I don't think he will mind being licked, sir. He proposes to go down fighting."

"Well," said Eastingham, "why don't he make arrangements with me? He don't think I had anything to do with his father's death, I hope!"

"He knows you were fighting Mr. Robinson tooth and nail. As I said, he won't let any one profit from the tragedy without a contest."

Enoch cackled mirthlessly. "On his head be it. I'm willing to treat. Tell him that. And I rather like you. Modest young fellow. Not too cocksure. Come and see us again."

The interview was over, evidently. Smith was filled with fear that he had said too much. On the other hand he did not think that Eastingham was a murderer or even aware who the murderers were. There was something likable about the old spider. He would weave and spin, but he wouldn't assassinate.

"I'M going to sit here and read a little," said Eastingham. "I won't be missed. Go out and talk to Margaret. Give Bates a run for his money."

"I was rather surprised to find Mr. Bates in your house, sir. I supposed he was with the Robinson outfit."

"He's a friend of Margaret's.

You're with Robinson yourself, boy. The girl invites whom she likes. Won't consult me. Only relative I've got. Fine girl. Go out and talk with her."

They had turned on the radio and Margaret was dancing with Bates while Mr. Gerard was whirling around with Miss Jennings. Smith talked to the middle-aged ladies until the music stopped, and then Miss Jennings demanded his attention.

Bates stuck close by Margaret's side during the evening, and she appeared content. Smith wondered whether she expected him to butt in, but he lacked the courage. When Bates, perforce, danced with Miss Jennings, Irving seized his opportunity.

"I've been wondering what became of you," she said reproachfully. "The least you could do was to pay your hostess some slight attention."

"You seemed very busy."

"Only the brave—you know the rest of it. Sam doesn't like you much."

"A mutual feeling, I assure you."

"Well, he is a very bold person and girls love audacity. Let's dance." After a few minutes: "But you dance very well for a professor."

"Thanks. You're easy to dance with—you follow perfectly."

"Oh, we must stop. The Gerards are going."

Most reluctantly he relinquished her. There was a strange glow all over him from contact with the dainty and magnetic person of the girl with red hair. Alas! It was his last chance. The Grews went away with the Gerards.

"Sam," asked Margaret, "will you take Ruth Jennings home?"

"I'd be delighted except that I am late for an appointment," Bates said with a bow of apology toward Miss Jennings. "Won't the professor be available?"

"I'll be charmed," replied Smith. Miss Jennings was pretty, but she didn't interest him, and he suspected that the excuse was a ruse on Bates's part to permit him to remain alone with Margaret. However, she was piqued because he refused her request and said:

"Then hurry right along, Sam. Don't stand on ceremony. I know your engagement must be very important."

Bates exited ahead of Smith and Miss Jennings. As the professor was making his adieu, Margaret tapped him in friendly fashion on the arm and said: "You have my telephone number and you'd be surprised how often I have a free evening."

"I'll call you to-morrow," he said.

"No, because I shall not be at home at all to-morrow. Next day, perhaps."

IRVING SMITH accompanied Miss Jennings to her home, a few blocks distant, murmured conventionally that he hoped to see her soon again and departed. He had a most agreeable evening, and Margaret Eastingham was much more beautiful in a green velvet evening dress than he would have supposed possible for the already beautiful girl of the sleeping car.

He had a feeling that she liked him and that he owed the dinner invitation more to her desire to see him again than to her uncle's wish to look over the adviser of his enemy. It was evident, however, that old Enoch had taken advantage of the opportunity to size him up pretty thoroughly.

He thought he had the answer to the presence of Sam Bates in New York which appeared to have perturbed the late William Robinson. Margaret was the answer. The fel-

low was madly in love with her and probably spent as much time in New York as his job would permit.

It seemed to Smith as he lay in bed that the part of wisdom for Bill lay in accepting the olive branch which Eastingham was willing to extend. After all, money, after it had reached a million or two, was meaningless. A man could only eat three meals a day and wear one suit of clothes at a time. Travel is comparatively inexpensive, and even the dressing and bejeweling of a wife can be done nicely upon the income of a few millions.

Beyond that, income only piles up and becomes a terrible burden. Of what use to any human being was hundreds of millions of dollars? Power? Yes; probably old Enoch Eastingham got a thrill out of controlling vast enterprises and fighting with his millions against other men of great wealth. Robinson had lost his life in the game when he was still a young man as age is reckoned nowadays, and he had got little enjoyment from his fortune.

Bill Robinson didn't want power. As for Irving Smith, if he had an assured income of twenty-five thousand dollars a year he would not hesitate to ask Margaret to marry him. They would go to some sylvan spot, build a little house and spend forty or fifty years perfectly contented in each other's society . . . When his meditations reached this point he fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

AN ARREST.

IT was about this moment that Bill Robinson, who had turned in dog-tired, about ten o'clock, was awakened by the ringing of the telephone. He rubbed his eyes, yawned and reached for the instrument at his bedside.

"Mr. Robinson," said a male voice, "this is Police Inspector Gaddis speaking. We have made a very important arrest and we have secured a statement from our prisoner. The chief told me to get you on the phone and ask you if you can see me."

"Come right up," exclaimed Bill. "Take you long to get here?"

"About fifteen minutes, sir."

"I'll be waiting for you."

He ran the water in his bath and took a cold plunge to clear his head, dressed quickly and went down to his father's study, where he instructed the butler to conduct the inspector as soon as he arrived.

He was kept waiting only a few minutes. Inspector Gaddis, a six-footer, blond and a trifle bald, with light blue eyes, a solid chin, a paunch and a heavy blond mustache, came into the study.

"How are you, Mr. Robinson," he said rather diffidently. "Say, after being led through a lot of marble halls in this palace, it's funny to find you in an office no better than mine at police headquarters."

"This was my father's den, Inspector. I'm not so strong for the grandeur myself and I like to hang out here. Sit down. I know you have something important to report."

"I suppose you think the police haven't been accomplishing anything on this case, sir," said the inspector as he seated himself. "The department never worked harder on anything in its existence and we're making progress."

"Delighted to hear it."

"About a week ago we found the truck from which the bomb was thrown, and we pinched the driver. We

got a statement from him and we've been looking for the man who sat beside the driver and the fellow on top of the load who threw the bomb. Well, to-night we nabbed the man on the driver's seat and we have a line on the bomb throwers."

"Anarchists?"

"Anarchists? Nix! This was a hired job, Mr. Robinson."

Bill nodded, tensely. "I've suspected that all along."

"All we had to go on," said the inspector importantly, "was a statement by one or two bystanders that they saw a truck loaded high with boxes, and a man on top stood up and swung his arm. In the excitement of the explosion nobody paid much attention to the truck and it got away. Well, we combed the city for it, interviewed about every truckman in town, lined up all the contractors; and a week ago we found the truck."

"So you have already stated."

"IT belonged to the Flint Trucking Company," said Gaddis. "It was driven by a man named Dennis Murphy, who had been with the company for twenty years. The night before the crime, Flint got an order to call at an address on Canal Street and take a load of packing cases to a warehouse in Jersey City. The person who gave the order said his own men would load the truck, so Flint sent it up with only the driver.

"He backed up at the Canal Street place and two men began to load big boxes on the truck. They didn't ask him to help and he just sat in his seat and let them work. When the job was done one of the men got on top of the load and sat down there and the other climbed into the seat beside the driver. This fellow said they would go with him to Jersey and unload. They told him to drive down Broadway and when he said that the water front was easier they told him he was working for them; so he did as he was told. He drove slowly and got bawled out by several traffic officers for being on Broadway, and finally came near the Cosmos Bank Building. He had just got by it and was close to the corner of a side street when there came a terrific detonation apparently right behind.

"Murphy looked around, naturally, and the man alongside of him jammed a gun into his ribs. 'Turn down that street!' the gunman ordered, cussing him; and Murphy turned down the side street, which was almost empty. 'Step on the gas,' the man ordered. Murphy did as he was told and at the corner of Trinity Place he was ordered to stop. He drew up to the curb. The man on the load slid off to the ground and the fellow in the seat got down.

"'Now, listen,' he said. 'My friend here has just chucked a bomb into the Cosmos Bank and killed a hundred people. If the mob catches you, they'll tear you to bits. If you open your face, the police will send you to the chair. They've got to convict some one and they'll never get us. You keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you.'

"Murphy was so terrified that he sat there and let them get away. He saw them run down into a subway entrance. A couple of minutes later he saw a man running down the street from the direction of Broadway and he asked him what had happened. 'Anarchists just blew up the Cosmos Bank Building,' the man told him. Murphy says he started up his truck and got out of there as soon as possible. He drove down to the water

front, entered a pier, unloaded the truck himself; the load consisted of empty packing cases. Then he drove back to the Flint company and reported that there was nobody at the address where he was sent and he hadn't got a load."

"What did he do that for?" asked Bill, astonished.

"I told you he was crazy with fear. And if we caught the driver of that truck the same day that the crime was committed, it certainly would have gone hard with him. Well, our men saw Flint within a couple of days after the murders and he seemed to have a clean bill of health. Murphy worked for two or three days and then went on a drunk. He was gone a week or so and then he went to his boss, shaking with D. T.'s, and coughed up the whole story. We took him to headquarters and gave him the works. There isn't any doubt that he was innocent enough, but we'll send him up as an accessory after the fact."

"I don't see how you can do that. The man was menaced by a gun."

"Yes, but he had no business concealing what he knew."

"I don't blame him under the circumstances," said Bill, thoughtfully. "I don't want him punished. I want the criminals."

"Well, we've got the man who rode on the seat. Got him to-night. Got a confession out of him. He's a Chicago gunman and his pal is responsible for a lot of bomb outrages in Chicago. He'll get the chair, all right."

"I'm glad to hear it! What did he confess?"

"Well, it seems that somebody hired him and his pal to come to New York to bump off some people. They were told to go to No. — Canal Street and wait there for orders. When they arrived there was a pile of empty packing cases in the shop—it's an old commission merchant's building. They sat around and smoked. They were going to get ten thousand dollars for the job. On the morning your father and his partners were killed, the man who hired them arrived and told them what they were to do. He was in the place and saw them load the truck and he told them he would meet them on the corner of Forty-First Street and Eighth Avenue after they had done the job and give them the balance of their money. They got five thousand in advance."

BILL broke in: "He told them that my father and his partners would be in the room on the second floor of the Cosmos Bank Building at a certain hour?"

"They didn't know who would be there and they didn't care. He gave them a plan of the building with the window marked with a cross, and gave them instructions to pass it at eleven."

"I see. Go on."

"Well, they made their get-away and rode uptown in the subway. The pay-off man was waiting for them, handed them their gelt, and then they separated."

"How did you find this man?"

"Caught him in one of his hang-outs in Chicago. He was fool enough to boast, and a stool pigeon gave him away. A couple of our officers brought him right on to New York."

"And the bomb-thrower?"

"Haven't got him yet, but we know him. Their names won't mean anything to you. Luke Picone is the one we caught. The fellow who threw the bomb was Joe Denothene, a Greek or a Bulgarian. We'll have him in soon."

"I'm not in the least interested in

those two yeggs," said Bill coldly. "Of course they deserve the chair. Who paid them and for whom was he working?"

"All we've got is a description of the pay-off man. Naturally these killers wouldn't know the man higher up."

"You realize, of course, Inspector, that somebody well acquainted with the habits of my father and his partners, and to whose interests it would be to have all the members of the firm slain, supplied these scoundrels with the information which enabled them to succeed?"

"Sure. I realize that. But it's going to be hard to find him. He would know how to cover up."

"The pay-off man, as you call him, will know who he is."

"No, sir. There will be two or three between him and them."

"That's the man I want punished. I have no more animosity against these bomb-throwers than I have against the steel and explosive which killed my father. They are equally instruments. Find the murderer."

"The chief thought you would be delighted to know we had caught one of the killers and almost had our hands on the other."

"I congratulate you, of course, but I want the real killer."

"Well, we do, too, but in cases like this he's almost never caught."

"In this case he's going to be caught," declared Robinson excitedly. "It will be my chief object in life."

"Maybe you can help us to find the motive, sir. Our business is with criminals. If your father's enemy was in the criminal world, we'll find him in time, but if he is some shrewd man who never committed a crime before, and who never will again, why, we're up against it."

"Whoever is responsible came in touch with the criminal world either personally or through agents. There is a big reward for the arrest and conviction of the killer. Pass the word along among the crooks that I'll pay fifty thousand dollars for information that is helpful, whether it results in conviction or not."

"That will do it, sir. For fifty thousand dollars most of these yeggs would send their own mothers to the chair."

"All right. Go to it. I'm glad to have met you, Inspector, and I'll stand behind the Police Department in any expenses outside what the department allows."

GADDIS bowed himself out, and Bill was left alone with his problem. He began to pace the room. What the police had discovered bore out the opinion of the shrewd attorney Reach. The destruction of the firm of Robinson and Company had nothing to do with anarchists. It was quite unlikely that the magnitude of his father in the financial world was known in anarchist circles, and if they wanted to destroy a big Wall Street man they would have chosen some widely advertised character—Enoch Eastingham, for example, a man whose indigestion was as well known as his millions.

Whoever had brought the bomb-throwers to New York was aware that the meeting in the office of the president of the Cosmos Bank would take place at a certain time. It was possible that his father proposed to take some definite action at that meeting which would have been injurious to the instigator of the murders, and he would have used the bomb as a last resort. In that case it meant that he previously might have made appeals of

various kinds, of which there would be some record. All correspondence of every sort during the last six months must be gone over with great care.

If only he could discover what was under consideration at that meeting, he might be able to lay his hand upon the murderer! It was big business, without a doubt, financing of some sort, drastic action, perhaps. Well, the bomb had destroyed all who attended the meeting, but the persons concerning whom the Robinson firm members were deliberating were still alive, and not more than one of them was a criminal. Bill thought he could find out.

Unaware that Irving Smith had dined with Sam Bates, he began to wonder if Smith had found out anything about the fellow. He knew already that he was bold and unscrupulous and hanging on by his teeth to his present job as president of the Consolidated Express Airways.

And his headquarters were in Chicago, home of the bomb-throwers. Yet it didn't seem reasonable that Bates would kill by wholesale to lengthen his tenure of office. Was it possible that his father was in possession of knowledge which would endanger the life or liberty of Bates? It might be that the four men in that room knew something unknown to anybody else and whoever had brought about their death now considered himself safe.

Bill was getting nowhere with his conjectures, and he finally decided to go back to bed, but he was unable to sleep for hours. He had an appointment with Reach in the morning, and at that time the lawyer expected to put him in touch with his affairs. The auditors had nearly completed their work. The books had been gone over, the securities in the bank vaults enumerated, and the holdings of the company tabulated.

Bill thought that by a process of elimination he might arrive at whatever business concern was in such straits that the destruction of his father and his partners would be of value to them. Anyway, it would be helpful to know where he stood. And with that small consolation he finally fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

UNKNOWN CODE.

MR. REACH was at the office at nine thirty, and found Robinson eagerly awaiting him. The lawyer greeted him warmly. The grim, gray little attorney had few intimates and no illusions, but he liked the way the boy had tackled his great problem.

"You've heard the news that the police have captured one of the two men concerned in the bombing?" Reach began.

"Inspector Gaddis called on me about midnight and told me all he knew," said Robinson. "The papers made a big fuss about it, but they're still talking anarchists. Not a word about the confession of the fellow that he and his pal were paid ten thousand for the job."

"Eh? The police would keep that quiet, of course. I didn't know it myself. It bears out my original thought that the crime was instigated for business reasons."

"No doubt of it at all, Mr. Reach. I'm thoroughly convinced that you have my father's murderer in that batch of reports somewhere. Let's find him."

"The sooner the better, my boy—for your own safety," Reach said.

"What do you mean?"

"My theory is that your father and his partners were slain to cause this company to cease functioning. They had every reason to suppose that you would liquidate as quickly as possible. Instead you are carrying on the business energetically, and they have no means of knowing that you were not fully informed of your father's purposes. Having removed four men who stood in their way, they are not apt to balk at killing you."

"I get you, sir. My sister inherits after me. She lives in England, she's married over there. Naturally the firm would have to go out of business. However, I expect that they figure that I'll make a mess of things and count myself out very shortly. And they may be right."

"You're probably safe until you prove dangerous; nevertheless, I should be on my guard."

"I'll be careful. Now please tell me what I need to know."

"I find that you are in practical control of two transcontinental railroad systems—that is, you own thirty-five to forty per cent of the stock in these roads. You control the Mammoth Motor Works, which manufactures nearly a third of all motor vehicles and ten per cent of all airplanes made in America."

"I'm aware of that, of course. Go on."

"Your father had managed to control Goliath Oil, though your holdings are less than twenty per cent. That's a fifty million dollar corporation. Through Goliath, without owning a share of their stock, he dictated the policy of half a dozen other oil companies whose total capital is thirty or forty millions. Railroads, motors, airplanes and oil, you see, are intimately associated these days. Through the Renfawn Holding Corporation, he controlled a group of bituminous coal mines in Pennsylvania, immensely valuable properties, and by small ownership of stock and the influence of his personality and power he was in practical control of six or eight motor manufactories, plane makers and gas engine makers. All the names and details are in the report; I'm just summarizing the situation."

"Thanks. My head is aching already. How did father happen to overlook steel?"

Reach smiled. "He didn't. I was coming to that. He has about thirty per cent of the stock of Grantlock Steel, the third largest plant in America. Steel, iron, coal, oil, motors, planes and railroads all have common interests nowadays."

"About all that's left are food and clothing. Are we in those industries?"

"They were not necessary in his plans, being dependent entirely upon transportation."

"Well, I'm glad I don't have to worry about those, too."

"As regards banking, you have fifty-one per cent of the stock of the Cosmos Bank with assets of two hundred million dollars, and the Cosmos owns the majority of the stock in six or eight banks scattered over the country with assets of one hundred and fifty million dollars."

BILL nodded. "Most of what you have told me I have already discovered. We sound like a trust that ought to be put out of business."

"The attitude of government to great combinations has entirely changed. Your father's control of these interdependent industries has resulted in lower prices and better dis-

tribution. It happens, however, that much of your control is based upon borrowed money. That's your weakness, and that's where your enemies will try to hit you."

"They're trying already." Bill told him about Eastingham's letter to the stockholders of Medford Motors.

"The old fox!" commented Reach. "He'll get control. Let him. It's a small concern. He wants you to rush into the market and buy madly. Most likely he had the company in his pocket before he sent out that letter."

"It was on your advice that I tackled this job, Mr. Reach. Don't you realize it's too big for me?"

Reach grinned. "I suspected it might be."

"Then what was your object?"

"To present a bold front until you had smoked out your enemies. I think you'll uncover the murderer of your father and his partners. And then you can make a deal with legitimate opponents by which your business will be taken over upon an equitable basis. If the word had got out that you intended to liquidate immediately, I doubt if you could have saved anything. You are in a position, as a result of your support of the market, to renew most of your bank loans, aren't you?"

"Yes. I'm informed that most of them will be renewed."

"Well, if you hadn't supported the market they would have foreclosed your loans, the bottom would have fallen out of your stocks, the wolves would have been on your flanks, and you and your sister would have been penniless. I didn't dare tell you how serious was the situation lest you lose your nerve."

"What do you think of my situation now?"

"Not bad. No doubt your opponents are dickering with your various executives and quietly picking up loose blocks of stock in your various corporations, but you are holding the fort. Wall Street is sending out rumors about your weakness, but money is tight just now, and they don't care to sell your stocks unless they are sure they are in for a slump. The way you jumped in with that reserve fund of your father's has frightened them a trifle. Have you found out yet why he had accumulated it?"

"I can't find out, sir. I've made cautious inquiries around the office. Of course I can't come out openly and ask what he was going to do with those millions. I am guessing that he was going to buy aviation stocks with them. Probably intended to monopolize the air."

"I've been looking into that, Bill. I don't think he had any such intention, because the thing is impossible."

"Why? Railroads have been consolidated until there are only two or three systems in the country. Steel is practically monopolized. Packing has been consolidated. The coal mines are in our hands and Eastingham's. Why not the air?"

"Because the air is free. Anybody can make gas engines. Landing fields are owned by municipalities which are obliged to permit their use to anybody who wishes to pay a small fee. True, there are only a dozen companies operating passenger air lines, and you control two or three of them, but there is nothing to stop the establishment of new air lines. Railroads have to buy a right of way and then build their road at an expense of hundreds of millions of dollars, and it takes three or four years. I doubt if it would be possible to build a new transcontinental railroad to-day. The cost would be prohibitive."

"They'd be foolish to do it. Airplanes are going to put them out of business as regards passenger traffic."

"Well, it is safe to consolidate them. New competition is impossible. No, your father wasn't foolish enough to think he could monopolize the air."

"I'M going over every scrap of correspondence in the office and at home. I won't quit until I find out. I believe that the thing which father was discussing in the office of the Cosmos Bank was responsible for his death and that of his partners."

Robinson then told the lawyer what he had deduced from the statement made by Inspector Gaddis the night before.

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Reach thoughtfully. "There is no doubt that it was a momentous conference, eh?"

Miss Nevin, Robinson's secretary, had entered. She was a thin, dark, rather unprepossessing young woman with rimless eyeglasses.

"This telegram has just arrived, sir," she said. "I couldn't make head or tail of it. Cipher, I presume."

Bill reached for the yellow slip, looked at it, and passed it over to the attorney.

"Somebody is trying to communicate with me in Choctaw," he said with a grin. "Won't he be disappointed when he gets no answer?"

Reach inspected the message in bewilderment:

Samvi larmo singinva moslu exgru vol. LEWTON.

"Addressed to you," Reach commented. "Who in the devil is Lewton?"

"Nobody that I know. Wait a minute. I want to show this to Smith."

"I've got to return to my office," said Reach. "Appointment. Good morning."

Bill entered the professor's office and submitted the telegram to him.

"What language is this, Socrates?" he demanded.

Smith inspected it. "No known tongue," he replied after a moment. "I think it is a special code, each word representing an English word or a phrase. Impossible to translate without the code book."

"Well, we have the fellow's name. Lewton. Let's find out if anybody in the shop ever heard of him."

Smith pressed a button on his desk and Miss Gregg entered.

"Good morning. How do you like your new job?" asked Bill cheerfully.

"It's a sinecure so far," she said with a respectful smile.

"Well, make inquiries in the various departments and find out if anybody ever heard of Mr. Lewton."

"Lewton? He writes or wires in code, doesn't he?"

"Right," declared Robinson. "Who the deuce is he?"

"I don't know, but there were several letters and telegrams signed by him in the letter file which I delivered to Mr. Redding."

Bill emitted a low whistle.

"Ever see a code book?"

"No, sir."

"Thanks, Miss Gregg, that will do."

"Get that?" demanded Bill when they were alone. "Redding was in communication with this bird. Redding was anxious to get that letter file, and I, like a boob, allowed her to deliver it to him. Smithie, it comes over me slowly that Mr. Redding knew what father was considering at that meeting. Redding pulled out of the office immediately after the tragedy. Redding tried to hire away

Miss Gregg. Redding was told to look up Sam Bates and did nothing. What are we going to do about Redding? It would be like the fellow to carry off office secrets, particularly if they had any value.

"Of course this Lewton cipher may be of no consequence, but it's significant that he carried off the letter file containing previous messages from the fellow."

"Lewton . . . Lewton," Smith was repeating. "It's a curious name, and I've heard it."

HE pressed the button and Miss Gregg again entered.

"Please bring me 'Who's Who,'" he instructed.

In a moment she was back with the red volume, which Smith opened eagerly, turned to the L's, ran his finger down a couple of pages and uttered an exclamation.

"Chester Lewton, inventor," he exclaimed. "Born in New York City, March 1, 1889. Attended public schools in that city, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Graduated 1911, specialized in aëronautics. Entered British Royal Flying Corps, 1915, commissioned lieutenant 1916, captain 1917. Invented airplane machine gun named after him, which was adopted by R. F. C. Wounded at Amiens, 1918. Settled in New York City. Patented auxiliary wings for airplanes, 1921; circular feed, 1923; improved gyroscope, 1925; removed to Michigan City, Indiana, 1927. Unmarried."

Robinson picked up the telegram. "Sent from Michigan City. Call the operator there on the long distance telephone, Smith. Let's see if we can get him on the phone."

While Smith was putting in the call. Robinson was pacing the room. In a few moments Smith returned.

"I think we've got the bull by the tail," Bill exclaimed. "This fellow is a big airplane inventor. He has been communicating in cipher, which means he has something darned important. Redding was acting for father. Dad was accumulating a big reserve fund. That meeting was to discuss this thing. Redding betrayed us, and somebody who was also after the invention stopped action by bombing the meeting. I'll put Redding in the chair for this."

"Slow up," commanded the professor. "You're building this theory out of nothing. No invention would be important enough to justify wholesale killing. You've nothing to go on but a telegram in code. It might be a private affair of Redding's."

"Then why did Lewton wire me? He heard that Redding had left us and assumed I had the code. It belongs to the firm, and Redding stole it."

"Quiet," commanded Smith. "I've got Michigan City.

"Michigan City? I want to talk to Chester Lewton. Has he a telephone?"

There was a minute of tense waiting while the operator investigated.

"No such person listed," she replied. "Sorry."

"That's that," said Smith as he hung up. "Now what?"

"We know he's there," declared Bill. "Michigan City is near Chicago, isn't it?"

"About sixty miles east," replied Smith."

"We can make it in five or six hours by fast plane. Smithie, we'll call on this fellow Lewton. We can see him to-night and be back here to-morrow by ten or eleven at the latest."

"All on a hunch?"

"Sure. We'll get a plane and start right after lunch. We'll find Lewton, tell him the code has been stolen, and ask him what he wants of Robinson and Company. What is it, Miss Nevin?"

"Mr. Samuel Bates, president of the Consolidated Airways," she said. "He's in the office, and would like to pay his respects."

"Well, I'd better have a look at him. Get a report on him yet, Smithie?"

"I had dinner with him last night," the professor astonished Bill by replying. "He was one of the guests at Eastingham's."

"Well, what about him? How did he strike you?"

"To do him justice, I think that his reason for being in New York at the time your father sent that note to Redding was innocent. He's in love with Margaret Eastingham."

"Oh, ho, that's it. Well, how does he size up?"

"I may be unfair to him because I'm attracted to Miss Eastingham myself, but he struck me as a brutal and unprincipled person. Yet I wouldn't go so far as to say that he was capable of—you know what."

"Considering that he is a rival, that's very fair of you," said Bill with a smile. "I'll have a look at the fellow myself. Find out what we do to get a plane ready. We must own a lot and we ought to get a free ride."

"I'll attend to it," said Smith.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Destroying a Derelict

THE wreck of a wooden ship, especially if loaded with lumber, will float for months, a constant menace to navigation. Consequently, whenever one is sighted, a derelict destroyer is sent to blow it up.

When the wreck is located a cutter containing an electric battery and a torpedo is lowered to do the work. The torpedo is hoisted to the deck of the derelict and exploded by an electric spark operated from the cutter, which has retired to a safe distance. The torpedoes are square cans filled with blocks of wet guncotton and some dry guncotton. In the middle a fulminate of mercury cap is placed, to which is attached an electric wire. The torpedo weighs about seventy-two pounds.

When a wreck is submerged and the masts are gone, it has to be located and destroyed by means of a "sight box." This is an ordinary wooden box four feet long, painted green inside, fitted with a piece of window glass and made perfectly water-tight. When this is lowered over the side until it is three-quarters of its length under water, the observer can see a wreck twenty or thirty feet down in clear weather. The torpedo is lowered on the derelict's deck without launching the cutter, and the destroyer steams out of the danger zone, paying out the electric wire as it goes, and firing the torpedo when beyond range of the flying fragments of the geyser that follows a submarine explosion.

Minna Irving.

Silk

When birds of prey swoop down on a wealthy warehouse it's dangerous for the man who interferes with their well-laid plans, as copper Clip Madigan tried to do

By HOMER KING GORDON

"Lost, poor kid," Clip chuckled. "I wonder where in the heck he came from"

MILLIONS of dollars' worth of silk lay in the warehouses which lined the dimly lighted street, deserted except for an occasional taxicab uptown-bound, and a lone uniformed figure. Clip Madigan walked slowly down toward the cross-town street marking the end of his beat. It was raining slightly, so he kept close to the buildings, twirling his night stick as he went from door to door, trying each one to see that it was locked.

He found the delivery door of the Maddox warehouse open, but old Chris Olsen, the Maddox watchman, was standing just inside the doorway.

"Hello, Chris, you lucky old stiff," Clip hailed him, making a pass at the pudgy watchman's stomach with the end of his night stick. "You old-timers get all the breaks. It looks like my slicker for me."

"Yas, it will be a vet vun to-night," Chris agreed solemnly. "But maybe I'm not so lucky yet."

"No, why not?" Clip asked.

It was not like Chris to be glum and worried. The old watchman looked uneasily at the freight elevator before he answered.

"I ain't so young yet," he muttered, stroking the butt of his revolver and then letting his fingers wander restlessly to the time-clock hooked in his belt. "Maybe that's it. Yas, you think so?"

"Depends on what you've got on

your mind," Clip said gravely. "Anybody been hanging around here acting suspicious? What's happened?"

Chris shook his head.

"It's like somebody was watchin' me. I dunno. To-night I felt like that, so I waited for you to come by."

"Well, let's have a look," Clip suggested. "I'll make the rounds through the building with you."

THE old watchman's fingers trembled as he locked the door. Clip followed him through the corridor into the big office room on the pavement level. The Maddox building consisted of four floors and a basement.

They started their tour of the building in the basement, reached by a narrow stairway at the rear of the building. There were two time-clock stations to be punched in the basement, which was used for the storage and manufacture of packing cases. Chris switched on all the lights.

A squad of policemen could not have searched the basement thoroughly in the time to took the old watchman to complete his duties there, but Clip circled the room once and looked into as many of the possible hiding places as he could reach before Chris was ready to go upstairs.

He found nothing there to justify the old watchman's fear, nor did he find anything on the floors above. However, he did not feel that his time had been wasted without cause. Chris was a former policeman with medals to prove his nerve and courage.

"Why don't you call up your patrol chief and tell him what you told me?" Clip Madigan urged.

Chris shook his head. "If I see something, yes," he agreed. "But just because I feel something, no."

Clip could understand his reluctance. A night watchman with jumpy nerves got little sympathy from a hard-boiled patrol chief.

"I'll look in when I come around this way again," Clip promised.

A fortune in silk was stored on the two upper floors of the Maddox building. Money or jewelry of equal value would have been locked in vaults and protected by all the safeguards human ingenuity could devise, but the silk was left piled there with only one old man to see that it was not stolen. One old watchman, and the police department.

Clip squared his shoulders and snapped his night stick out to the end of the leather thong so viciously that it cracked his knuckles when it flew back. Naturally, the time-clock stations were wired to a central agency and if old Chris did not punch in each station at the approximate time it should be punched, an emergency squad would come and investigate.

But, in Clip's opinion, by the time they got there it would be too late to do anything more than investigate, as far as any silk robbery was concerned. It was up to the police to see that the robbery was stopped before the stolen silk was carted away.

It was up to him.

CLIP had not walked more than a block from the Maddox building when he saw the slinking figure of a man slip out of the recessed doorway of a cigar store and walk rapidly down one of the side streets.

It might have been some one who had stepped in there to get out of the rain, or to light a cigarette, of course; but Clip quickened his step and when he arrived at the corner he was not surprised to find the side street deserted. The tail-light of an automobile could be seen in the distance.

The prowler either had got into the car and been driven away, or was hiding somewhere along the street. Keeping out to the edge of the sidewalk, Clip walked down to the end of the block and back, without finding any trace of the man he had seen dodge around the corner.

When he found nothing to justify an alarm or an extensive search of the neighborhood, Clip abandoned the side street. However, he did not forget the incident. It was nearly time for him to ring in and his call box was several blocks away.

That was an important bit of routine which had to be followed. Clip was a patrolman who let nothing interfere with the strict observance of his official duties, but half a block away from the call box he looked anxiously up and down the street, mindful of the time, and then stepped into a small lunch counter restaurant for a call which had all the earmarks of being purely social.

The red-headed girl dressed in white who sat on a stool behind the cash register would have provided an excellent excuse for any man to neglect his business for a cup of coffee. The chef, a dark-faced fat man, sprawled across the lower end of the counter with his head pillowed on his arms, winked a bilious eye at Clip.

Moving nothing but his eyelid he had expressed his whole philosophy of life in general and cops in particular. The red-headed girl was not so indifferent.

"Hello, you," she said smiling. How's crime to-night?"

Clip leaned against the cigar counter and grinned.

"How's a cop to keep his mind on crime when it keeps him awake day and night worryin' about you?"

"Don't lose any sleep over me, big boy," she advised him. "Nothing's ever happened to me, and won't."

He shook his head and sighed with mock seriousness.

"If Ziegfeld or any of them glorifiers ever get a flash at you, what chance would a poor cop have after that?"

"Well," she reminded him, "I still buy my silk stockings at Gimbels' bargain counters."

"Are you blaming me for that?" he asked.

"The wife—"

"Of a common ordinary cop couldn't even afford silk stockings," Clip finished the remark when she hesitated. "Only, darlin', my career is just started; and how 'll you expect to claim credit for my success if you wait until I'm an inspector before you marry me?"

"No, Clip," the red-headed girl told him quickly, "you're not common and ordinary, but—"

Clip had known Ellen Fogarthy for eighteen of her twenty years. They lived in the same block and had played under the same fire department sprinkler as kids. It was Clip who had got Ellen the job she now held, although he did not entirely approve of the night shift she was working. That was her idea. She spent her mornings studying stenography.

"ARE you hintin' that I should do a little graftin' on the side—say, wink one eye and let a load of silk get out?" he demanded.

"You're too dumb to be anything but honest," she retorted with a smile. "Here, lean over."

She took a small lace-trimmed handkerchief from the pocket of her uniform, and when Clip obediently leaned

across the counter, wiped a tiny smear of dried blood from the point of his chin.

"You can't even shave without cutting yourself."

"I do it on purpose," Clip protested, grinning irrepressibly.

She slapped his face when he delayed getting it back out of her way.

"I hope you get your ears full of rain to-night," she declared. "Does some one have to tell you to get your slicker, when it starts raining?"

"Some one always does," Clip chuckled.

"That's a big life job to try to sell me."

"I know, darlin'," Clip admitted, suddenly sobered. "Ambitions are funny things. I always wanted to be a policeman and now that I am one, I want to be one of the best. You're ambitious, too, and I'm proud of you. Keep up your study. You'll get somewhere."

"You're just dumb." There was almost a break in her voice, but Clip was too busy with his own thoughts to notice it.

"See any strangers drifting around here to-night?" he asked.

"I don't remember any," she answered quickly. "Why?"

Clip told her about old Chris, the Maddox watchman, and of the man he had seen sneaking out of the cigar store doorway.

"Why don't you call in and have a car sent up?" she suggested.

That was the same advice Clip had given the old watchman.

"And let the boys think I had a case of nerves?" he said lightly.

"I suppose you'd rather play hero and have a swell funeral, even if it did mean that some company lost a hundred thousand dollars' worth of silk?" she commented, shrewdly enough to make Clip wince.

The fat chef down at the end of the counter snorted, and then subsided again into silence and immobility. Clip's jaws snapped shut.

"I'm not yelling wolf until I see one," he stated stiffly.

"Some men hate to be laughed at," Ellen observed. "Me, I'd rather have a few jeers than a few roses any time, especially if I had to get the roses as coffin decorations."

"Some of us are dumb, I guess," Clip agreed, turning toward the door. "See you later."

"Don't you want a cup of coffee?" Ellen asked quickly.

"Got to ring in."

He walked out of the restaurant without turning his head. The red-headed girl ran around the cigar counter and caught the door before he had time to close it completely.

"I'm sorry, Clip," she begged. "I didn't mean to be nasty."

"Forget it," he patted her hand. "I—"

Without finishing the remark, he stared past her down the street. Coming toward them was a little boy three or four years old. The youngster had his hands up over his face and was crying bitterly.

"Lost, poor kid," Clip chuckled. "I wonder where the heck he come from."

THE little boy screamed with terror as Clip squatted on the pavement in front of him. When he found him too hysterical to be soothed in any other way, Clip took him in his arms and walked back to the restaurant door and gave him to the girl.

"Take him inside and we'll see if we can't get him quieted down," he advised. "He's just lost and scared. His

clothes aren't wet, so he must belong around here somewhere. Ever see him before?"

There were two red finger-marks on the youngster's face where some one had pinched or struck him.

"Clip, I saw this kid in an automobile that passed here about five minutes before you came in," Ellen declared. "I was at the window when the car drove past and I noticed the kid because he was crying then. He had his face up against the glass as though he was trying to get out. It was a big closed car with two men in it."

"No women?"

"No. I'm sure."

"That would account for his clothes being almost dry," Clip commented. "Maybe the car's parked here somewhere. The kid may have been left in the car."

"Clip, this boy never belonged in that car. Look at the bruise on his cheek. He's been beaten. That's why he's crying so hard."

Clip looked at the youngster's clothes. The blouse was of cheap material and had been laundered many times. The shoes were cheap and worn.

"He might have been kidnaped," he agreed quietly. "But if he was kidnaped, how did he get away from two men in a closed car and get here? And why would any one want to kidnap a kid that comes from as poor a family as this one does, if he's wearing his own clothes?"

"Somebody wanted to lose it, maybe," offered the chef, coming up from the back of the restaurant to shove a thick sandwich into the little boy's fists. The youngster clutched the sandwich, but continued to sob.

Clip looked out of the window just as a big car flashed past.

"That's the car," Ellen cried excitedly. "I'd swear it's the car, Clip."

By the time Clip reached the door, the car had swung around the nearest corner and had disappeared. He started after it, and then slowly came back to the restaurant.

"Listen, sweetheart," he said earnestly. "I've got a hunch that kid was planted where I'd be sure to find him. If I'm right, the kid was planted here to keep me busy for ten or fifteen minutes. The men who left him here knew when I was due to ring in. I'm going over to the Maddox building. If I'm not back here or haven't telephoned within fifteen minutes, call up headquarters and tell them to send up a squad car. I think there's a silk job on."

As he finished speaking a muffled explosion came faintly from the direction of the Maddox building. It might have been the backfire of an automobile muffler. It might have been the report of a pistol.

Clip heard it and started to run.

When Clip turned the corner he could see a large van backed across the sidewalk in front of the Maddox shipping door. The truck, painted black, bore no identification marks and was jammed up against the building so that the door was blocked.

Clip rapped the sidewalk with his night stick and while the street was still echoing with the noise of this call to the other officers in the neighborhood, he drew his gun and ran toward the truck.

The truck's Klaxon sounded one sharp blast of warning before the driver swung down to the pavement on the far side of the engine and began pumping buckshot at Clip from a sawed-off shotgun.

Some of the shot ricocheted from the pavement and stung his legs, but Clip

knew the range was too great for a shotgun. He dodged into a doorway long enough to fire one bullet toward the crouching driver. Throwing his shotgun away, the driver turned and ran, almost as though inviting pursuit.

CLIP ran out into the middle of the street and, dropping on one knee, took careful aim and fired again. The fleeing gangster threw up his arms and pitched forward.

It might have been a ruse to get him closer. Clip did not fall into the trap if it was such. The Maddox shipping doors were open but so blocked by the truck that he had to get down on the pavement and crawl under it to get into the building.

Chris Olsen, the night watchman, was lying on the floor by the elevator door. Blood was running from his mouth, but he was conscious and able to speak faintly when Clip raised his head.

"They came through the penthouse," he mumbled. "Man was hid on top elevator."

He continued to mumble, but Clip laid him gently on the floor and turned to the stairway door. There was a chance that the silk thieves would use the elevator and try to make their escape with the truck, but Clip figured they would try to get out by the way they had entered.

Anyway, the elevator was at the top floor, according to the indicator, Clip saw as he opened the stairway door. By watching the indicator as he passed each floor level he would know if the elevator started down.

No one challenged him on the first three floors and the elevator remained stationary. But as he opened the stairway door on the fourth and last floor, he was greeted by a fusillade of bullets.

It was a steel-covered fire door, and that saved his life. Hiding behind it, he fired at the flashes of the guns across the room. In the darkness of the smoke-filled room he was unable to see the silk thieves, but he knew they were on the narrow stairway which led up to the elevator penthouse.

While he was reloading his gun he heard the penthouse door clang shut. Risking the chance that one of the robbers might be waiting for him at the head of the penthouse stairs, he stumbled over the bales of silk to the foot of the stairs and sent one bullet up towards the door.

It was not answered.

But the battle was resumed the instant Clip stepped out on the roof. A gun flashed on the next roof and a bullet flattened itself on the door just above Clip's head.

There was enough light on the roof for Clip to see the shadowy figure of a man dodge behind the elevator shaft-house on the roof from which the shot had been fired.

Grimly resolved to hold his fire until he had a target, Clip tried to run across the roof. Something warm and sticky filled his shoes and he felt his legs wobbling.

From all around him he heard the sirens of approaching fire apparatus and police cars. As he stepped over the low ledge separating the two roofs, Clip grinned. Ellen had certainly turned in enough alarms, or some one else had.

Three men suddenly stepped out into the open with leveled guns.

"Put 'em up," Clip growled.

Their answer was a hail of lead.

Clip saw one of them drop before he himself went down. He was not conscious of any pain although he knew that he had been hit and that the men

had left him for dead. He saw two of them start across the roof-tops and watched two others join them.

In an instant later police reserves swarmed over the roofs.

WHEN they found him, Clip was propped up on one elbow, snapping his empty gun at the spot where he had last seen the men who had shot him. After they had taken him downstairs and were about to put him in the ambulance, Clip recovered consciousness for a few seconds.

A girl was bending over him, talking and crying. It was Ellen.

"Clip," she sobbed. "Why did you have to go get yourself killed? I didn't mean it, Clip, honest I didn't. I woulda married you any day if you'd only asked me. I was proud of you."

"Listen, lady," a hospital attendant pleaded, "give him a chance, will you? He can't hear a word you're saying an' he's bleeding to death."

Clip wanted to call him a liar, but before he could get the words started everything faded away into drowsy blankness. He woke up in a hospital bed.

Ellen was in the room, but, as she was wearing her street dress and the sun seemed to be shining, Clip concluded it must be the morning after the battle.

She was right at his side the moment he opened his eyes. She kissed him first and then put her fingers firmly over his lips to keep him from trying to speak.

"You've been out of your head a whole week, Clip, but the doctors say you'll get well if you'll be quiet. I gave you a pint of my own blood and you had to get three pints more besides." She explained happily. "You killed two of the silk thieves, and wounded another one, an' they caught the other three."

The nurse warned Ellen not to excite him, but Ellen kept on talking.

"The kid was just a plant; you were right. They picked him up off the street and brought him up where you'd find him. I telephoned the police the minute you left and then I went out and turned in a fire alarm. As soon as you get well you're gonna be promoted an' get a medal. The Maddox Company let me pick out ten dress patterns from everything they had in the house."

Clip's stern look was not misunderstood.

"I know what you're thinking," Ellen admitted. "You're saying to yourself that a cop's wife shouldn't accept rewards. But darn it, that's why I picked out good ones. I'll marry you an' probably never get a good silk dress as long as I live, so I took enough to last me a few years."

Ellen stopped to get her breath and Clip cautiously kissed her finger tips.

"No, don't try to talk," she warned. "Save your strength. As soon as you can say your part of the ceremony I'm going to marry you."

"I will."

The words were very, very faint but they were loud enough to bring the nurse up to the bed and get Ellen dismissed to a far corner of the room. However, no one ordered Clip to shut his eyes; and even if he was not allowed to talk, he could think and tell Ellen with his eyes that it would not be very long until she would have an occasion to wear a silk dress.

"Yes, darling," she said, answering his unspoken question, "I got one white silk pattern, and I'm having it made now."

THE END.

"Ride, Wind River! They're going to lynch him!"

The Law in Fraternity

Every track and every clew led straight to Harley Doon—and it hardly seemed that even his loyal friends could save him from the aroused wrath of the cow country

By CLEM YORE

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

HARLEY DOON, of the Circle Four, and "Ague" Witherspoon, proprietor of the All Aboard Saloon, whose tuberculosis doesn't affect his dangerousness with a shotgun, protect a young kid named John Timothy Jones from an unjust charge of horse-stealing. Jones was pursued to Fraternity by Splay-foot Moss, undersheriff of the adjoining Greer County, and two crooked cronies and fellow-deputies, Tub Webb and Sliver Skinker.

Sheriff Tom McGibbon of Grant County, in which Fraternity lies, knows Splay-foot had been caught misbranding a calf by the Circle Four foreman, Wind River Andy; and he knew Splay-foot had a grudge against Harley because the cowboy, unarmed, had whipped Moss in the All Aboard for defaming Sadie Majors, the telephone central at Amity. McGibbon learns that Jones actually owned the "stolen" horses; but he is sure Splay-foot is up to something, and lets him have free rein till he can catch him at it.

Splay-foot gets a key to the Forest Service fire alarm box telephones. He lies to Sadie about the affair in the All Aboard, convincing her that Harley

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was in the wrong. Then, with a telephone "test-set" that Sliver Skinker gets him, he taps the wires leading toward the distant Forest Service fire-boxes, and fools Sadie into thinking he is talking from them.

Just after Harley Doon has ridden past prospector Jake Craven's mine, Splay-foot and his two pals kill Craven, and rob him of $25,000 he had been paid for his mine. Splay-foot taps the telephone wire, telling Sadie he is at Box Number Three—forty-five miles from Craven's—and asking her the time: seven minutes to three. Then he drops the test-set in the deep Hour Glass Pool, and rides away, to come into Fraternity from the direction of Fire Station Number Three.

Sliver and Tub circle around, and come on the scene of the murder after Silver Dollar Harry's stage has arrived and his passengers are investigating. They all proceed to the near-by settlement of Meacham, to use Harry Fultze's phone. They want Harley Doon arrested; they've found the tracks of his Cigarette horse, some silver conchas torn from his stirrup-covers, and, near the hoof-prints, the iron box that held Craven's money.

CHAPTER VIII *(Continued)*.

A NOOSE OF "TRAIL SIGN."

AT the sight of the black-japanned iron box, Harley's friend Harry Fultze gritted his teeth.

"Looks bad," he admitted grimly. "I reckon we had better phone Fraternity."

"I'll do it," offered Alonzo Crow, owner of the Buena Vista Saloon.

"You keep away from that phone with both feet, that's what you can do. I'll phone Ague Witherspoon, and that's what I'll do. He's law and order, complete and entire! And he's a competitor of yours."

"He's a friend of Harley Doon's, too. Friend of Harley's dad, for years!" sneered Alonzo Crow.

"So am I, daggone you, so am I!" Fultze boomed. "Now see here, all you fellows—you, too, Judge Teller—Harley Doon ain't been found guilty of this murder yet. And he ain't going to be hung without a trial, and the evidence all heard by twelve good men and true sitting and hearing the evidence in your court. I'll tell Ague to pick Harley up and turn him over to Gabby Gratiot for safe keeping."

He walked into his store, rang central, asked Sadie Majors for Fraternity and then said to her, "Sadie, I ain't got much time, but, honey, you listen in, and when you get what I'm going to tell Ague Witherspoon, you call up Sheriff Tom McGibbon and tell him, too. I'm going on with the stage."

"Surely, Mr. Fultze. Has anything happened—serious?"

"You listen, girlie. I ain't got no time. Call Fraternity and get Ague to cross the street to the phone. Hurry!"

Sadie tremulously made the connection. Harry Fultze held the receiver to his ear and heard the girl ask for Ague Witherspoon. It seemed an age before the coughing voice of Ague made answer. Then Sadie listened, her heart pounding fiercely. Intuition had disturbed her since Splay-foot's call at seven minutes to three; now the hour was nearly six thirty.

"Listen, Ague," said Harry Fultze. "Jake Craven has been shot and his money box stolen. They're after Harley Doon, and I wants you to get him, lock him up in Gabby's jail house, and organize a bunch to keep him there safe for trial. There's fellows on the stage

what brought me the news, and is outside now, what 'd hang that boy on what evidence they've got—which the good Lord knows is plumb plenty. Get him back of the bars and don't tell nobody. I'm coming over and we'll see about this thing."

"Excuse me, when I'm excited I gotta cough a little. . . . Harley ain't here!"

"Where is he?"

"Oh, here he is now! I see him coming down the street. I thought he had lit out for the horse camp. I'll get him. That all?"

"Yes, but don't spread this news. It would touch off a magazine, the way the town's split in two factions over that horse-stealing business. You got plenty rifles and ammunition? Or shall I fetch over some?"

"I got plenty; but a few more won't be no drug on the market, if this thing gets the right scald on it!"

Harry Fultze walked to the stage carrying an armful of Winchesters; back of him came a Mexican youth staggering under the weight of a full case of carbine shells.

"I've done it," said Harry Fultze, "and Harley's being locked up by this time. Ague 'll have him safe before this stage gets going."

"This stage is going now!" yelled Silver Dollar. "Did you think to notify Tom McGibbon to bring down the coroner?"

"I told Sadie to listen in and then notify Tom. Is Jake all alone back there?"

"No," said the judge. "I appointed my clerk, Phil Fisher, to stay with the body. I applaud what you have done, Harry Fultze. While the evidence is quite conclusive and warrants an arrest, still precaution is advisable. We live in a violent community and among rash and foolhardy men. A tragic error might occur in this case. You did the wise thing to telephone Ague; he is a man of rare judgment."

"WHO found Jake?" asked Harry Fultze, loading his weapons and ammunition.

"I did," answered Silver Dollar, "and just when I was slowing down here come Sliver Skinker and Tubb Webb. They'd heard the shots on the ridge, and thought they seen a horse turn into that old cow trail. We all seen where a horse had pin-wheeled near the down-bars, and where Jake had dragged in the dust. He got his carbine out, and this was under him. He died trying to get it in action."

"Who found the money box?"

"I did," answered Alonzo. "Right alongside of the hoof-marks of that missing-shoe pony. I says the case is all over but the hanging, and I says—"

"You says too much," snorted Fultze. "Silence never got a man a mother-in-law, but it's good medicine to use in cases like this. Keep your shirt on, and don't think you're going to hang Harley, private. If he's hung it 'll be Tom McGibbon what sends out the invitations. Now who found them conchas?"

"I found the one in the grass at the side of the road," said the judge. "Sliver Skinker located the other near the well. All of us spent a lot of time examining the house and the road and the region in between for evidence. Then we left my clerk in charge, after carrying up the body and putting away Jake's pony. I reckon we must have spent forty minutes there, all told."

"Everybody stomping the ground, eh? Was there any horses parading over that road except the stage broncs and Jake's?"

"Yes, Sliver's and Tub's and three pack horses," replied Judge Teller. "We put these in Jake's field. Sliver and Tub considered devoting their attention to this case only at our insistence. While they are law officers, they belong in other counties, and they didn't know how Tom McGibbon might regard their action. I vouched for Tom. Somewhere north, Undersheriff Moss is following clews to some rustlers. Sliver and Tub were on their way to the region of the Circle Four to meet him when they came out on the road and upon the scene of the homicide."

"Huh," was all the reply Harry Fultze made. The stage hurried on, its occupants holding tight to the handslings as the body of the coach swayed and pitched from side to side. Then the lights of Fraternity showed. And into the long street rolled the stage. The place was quiet, ominously so. Fraternity as a town had not heard of Harley's arrest until Alonzo Crow, Sliver and Tub Webb broke into the Buena Vista and spread the news in all of its sanguinary details.

Then doors slammed, lights flashed, voices shouted, men and women ran here and there, clots and groups of people formed; a low hum of voices, like the drone of bees, sounded from behind opened and closed doors.

SADIE MAJORS had heard all that Harry Fultze had said to Ague Witherspoon. She imparted this to Sheriff Tom McGibbon, who instructed her to telephone certain spots between Amity and Jake's for change-horses. Tom was riding toward Fraternity with a posse and would put his broncs over the road in ten hours to do what the stage and ordinary traveling took two days of nine hours to equal.

These instructions carried out, Sadie plugged into the socket of the Forest Service Fire Lookout Station. This post was filled by a ranger, for three months out of the year, July, August and September, when the forests were bone-dry and the grass dead from the heat of summer. Now it had no one in it, officially, yet sometimes it was used by rangers on forest duty, when cattle were counted or surveys made for special reports.

Sadie trembled as she rang its number. No answer. Again she rang. And again and again. At last she gave it up, and gulped as a hideous thought struck her. Suppose Splay-foot had lied to her? Suppose he was not there?

She dropped her eyes. They fell upon a small white card which she had taken from a box of candy. She read the words it bore; and then she did an involuntary thing. She plugged in on the Circle Four and rang its bell. No answer either to this. The Circle Four would not be at its phone until later in the day, around eight o'clock. She decided to try at the exact second of Circle Four's time.

How the minutes dragged, and how Sadie was tortured!

She fingered the note, read it, hung onto certain lines of it which seemed to sear themselves into her brain.

> And I don't want to give no wrong notion.
> I'm not trying to be a sweetheart.

The thought of the man who had written those words came to her as a loveliness. Then the recollection of what she had said to him on the street when they had last met. Splay-foot's memory arose as she was thinking thus and somehow a sudden revulsion possessed her like a sweep of anger or dis-

gust. She plugged in and rang Circle Four. Wind River Andy answered. "Hello, Sadie, what's up?"

"Wind River, get your boys together and ride for Fraternity! Jake Craven was shot this afternoon and they have arrested Harley Doon and have him in jail at Fraternity. Ride, Wind River, quickly! If you don't they might lynch him!"

"Are you kidding me?"

"No, it's true! Get there as soon as you can. Ague Witherspoon and Harry Fultze are going to try to take care of him, but they say there's a lot of evidence against him."

"Tell Fraternity that we are coming," cried Wind River, "and let Tom McGibbon know too."

"Tom's riding relay to Jake's place, then on to Fraternity. He'll be there before you."

"Then he'll be riding some. Thank you, Sadie—that's white of you, plumb white."

"Don't you tell Harley now. Please! I'm mad at him."

CHAPTER IX.

PREPARING FOR WAR.

AS soon as Ague had ceased to converse with Harry Fultze he hurried outside where Harley Doon was about to drop out of his saddle. Ague at once flew at the task he had to tackle, in his own curious manner.

"Wait a minute, boy!" Ague said. "Stay where you are, sitting in your leather. I wants you to carry a gun up to Gabby Gratiot." He hurried into the All Aboard and returned carrying, not his reliable old shotgun, but a Wells Fargo sawed-off gun. "Take this to Gabby and wait for me. I'll be right at your heels."

"Say, Ague, what's all this about? And who's going to *whoo-whoo* who?"

"Sssh! and likewise shush! Don't rouse sleeping dogs, son. Get up to Gabby's, and before you go into the jail stick your Cigarette horse into Bill Jim John's livery stable. Take off that saddle and tell John I says for him to hide it under the blankets in his tack-room."

"Listen, Ague, what you hiding my saddle for?"

"Harley, I'm a slave to hunches, and the revelation I've had is that you'll be in a nasty fix, along about the time the stage gets in. Jake Craven was killed, just after you rode by his place. And the bloodhounds are on your trail."

"That's different, dissimilar, and nothing of the kind. It makes this whole thing as much like clear water as calcimine is like quinine. I seems to get a whispering nudge that somebody suspects me, right?" Harley was elaborately casual.

"Suspects? Rabbits'-tails! They've got a rope of circumstantial evidence around you that would hold a covey of rhinoceros pigs. Get gone, you young fool, and tell Gabby to stick you in the star-boarder's room. And you keep your head out of windows."

Harley wonderingly followed instructions and saw to it that all his rigging and his horse were well hidden. Bill Jim John, cross-eyed and lantern-jawed, knock-kneed and barrel-built, slithered across the floor like some grotesque member of the beetle family.

"What you reckon Ague wanted the saddle hid for?" he asked, for Harley had told the worst, first.

"I don't know. But a while ago I finds I've lost six conchas off one *tapidero*. That comes from tying more'n one concha on the same leather strip. Maybe somebody found one of them."

Bill Jim John caught sight of a pair of boots buried in a stall's straw. He kicked these. "Hi, Bruno, you get outa here."

An emaciated figure, evidently drunk, sleepily growled, turned over and would have gone back to rest had Bill Jim John permitted. But Bruno went out a rear door of the barn, Bill Jim John's left boot tattooing the seat of his pants as he bowled along. Into the friendly outside Bruno took stock of what he had heard.

"Now what's Harley Doon being sent to jail for? And why do they want to hide his saddle? And how come he lose them conchas? This will be worth a half a pint at the Buena Vista, and a pint down at the All Aboard. I'm glad I awoke just when I did. Sleep, shucks, nothing happens in sleep, but bedbugs, cramps and dreams!" Thus maundering, he became a link in the chain that was slowly being forged by the hammers of Fate.

Harley, with his own gun and Ague's, strolled over to the jail. He knocked on its door. Gabby Gratiot answered from within. "Who comes? And why? If a bill collector, *vamos!* If friend, enter, and be damned to you."

HARLEY opened the door, grinned, and stuck his guns back of the desk. "I would spill a little chatter in your ear," he said. "Soft talk, it is, but full of the yeast of trouble."

"You've sure come to the center of advice. Draw up your chair and commence where the start of your story begins."

In a few brief sentences Harley conveyed all he knew; just the purport of Ague's advice. Then he narrated an account of his trip to Amity, how he had met Jake coming back, took a letter from him to Harry, following the cut-off across the soft salt flats, on account of his pony having lost a shoe; of tacking on a new shoe at Fultze's and coming into Fraternity.

Gabby chewed his lip, and had nothing to say— All of which constituted a record in the annals of Gabby's life. Then in came Ague, and back of him Bill Jim John.

"You, Harley," said Ague, "get into your cell. This is a conference of the law-and-order strata of Fraternity, and as you're under doubt, suspicion, dismay, and are a Democrat to boot, you ain't got no right in this caucus. We wants to chatter."

Gabby led Harley to a small cell, the walls of which were of two-thickness adobe bricks covered with corrugated iron tacked to cedar posts set in the adobe.

"There you are, the best in the Hotel de Hardscrapple. You'll find a lamp on that table, a copy of 'Henry the Fourth,' second part; 'The Wives of the Prophet,' by Opie Read; 'Hoyle's Games'; and a true story of the Molly Maguires. When we want to hear your growl we'll rattle your chain," orated Gabby, as he slapped Harley's back and gently pushed him into the cell.

"I see you got your kingdom fenced," laughed Harley, "but what do you do with boys afflicted with itchy feet?"

"Tell them to saunter and strut up and down that cell. Two hundred perambulations to each heat, past the bed and by the table, makes you bone-lazy and gets you so's you whistle at every crossing. There's no harm in that, on a fine day! That'll cure anything but Yankeeism and cholera."

As the door closed Harley felt a sweep of weakening despair engulf

him. But he shook his head as the sound of his friends, talking outside his cell, came to him. This conversation was but a droning whir which took volume as its interest stimulated and excited its participants.

Ague mentioned the name of Splay-foot Moss. Bill Jim John's voice crashed upon the mention of the name:

"I'll dust off the old olive branch and keep it flourishing green, but if Splay-foot comes inching around this hoosegow I'll knock my knuckle into my elbow trying to put a piece of my peace into his brain parlor by the switchback of his chin . . . Yes, I understands plumbing. I can wipe a joint with any man. Pipes, wrenches, joints, elbows, fittings and solder was what I was raised on. Why, what you craving in the plumbing line?" the livery stable man roared.

Once more the voices stilled to a solemn murmur. Then came a sudden laugh, a scuffle of feet, an opening and a closing of a door, and the scratchy sound of shuffling boots crossing the gravel before the jail. Harley recognized those feet as belonging to Bill Jim John and understood that the stable man was in an unwonted hurry.

An hour went by.

Men were arriving and departing from the jail. Several names, spoken in greetings, Harley recalled as friends of Ague's and Gabby's.

"Huh," he mused, "them old pilgrims is sure assembling their troopers. Must be they figgers my neck is liable to be exaggerated from what it had oughta be."

SOON a wagon drove up, back of the jail, and unloaded a mass of iron pipes. Harley, by standing on a chair, looked from the window and saw Bill Jim John fitting a two-inch "T" to the pipe leading down from the thousand-gallon water-tank which supplied Gabby's alfalfa mill boiler with its steam-making liquid. In his amused interest at the inexplicable but rapid-fire action of Bill Jim John, Harley did not see Jerry come beneath his window. The last time he had talked with Jerry, that cowboy had loaned Harley a gun. Now he noted Jerry, who was standing with his back to him, directly under his window.

"Don't you get all broke out in no lather, Harley," came a voice, "nor covered with skeer. You've got lots of us fellows watching all who ain't with you." Harley recognized that voice, and understood that Jerry did not want any one who might be spying, to see him talking to Harley.

"I ain't got as much nerve as a toothache," said Harley softly, dropping his head below window-level; "but as long as Ague's my manager, and you boy's my friends, I aims to stay contented in here like I'd been hived up for years. That Ague may believe in fairies and horse-racing, but he can make his cunning run, any old time, without quirt or spur. What they doing with all that pipe, Jerry?"

"I don't know. I asked Bill Jim John, but he's steeped in solitaire and gave me nothing but a peewit's look," Jerry admitted.

"He don't look like you could indict him for being dull, now."

"Dull? I should say not. He's trouble-bound. Look at the fool fitting pipe from that injector to the water-supply coupling. Why, Harley, he's going to turn steam into that thousand-gallon tank. He might be Slow Slim as a chambermaid to a livery stable, but I'd say as a plumber that old boy is punctual. Have you got all you want in there?"

"Everything, thank you. What's the gossip, uptown?"

"That bum, Bruno, who was in the barn when you stuck away your saddle, told an earful all around town, and in the Buena Vista in particular. That crowd—you know the bunch I mean—is acting like a stuttering volcano; but it ain't dehorned. I understands it's just waiting until Alonzo Crow gets here. He's due on the stage.

"Some time this man's night is when we expects to be minus peace and plus riot.

"There ain't a box of shells on a shelf in any store in town, and I seen a dozen men coal-oiling guns and swabbing out barrels as I come up here to watch your window. I've got three short-fuse giant-powder sticks, all ready to be lit, under my coat, and I aims to fire-cracker them at the first mob I sees walking this way in platoons."

"Come and get it," called a voice back of Harley. "Does you like your java straight, or has you a craving for cow juice in it?"

"Good-by, Jerry," murmured Harley. "Gabby and me is going to dinner." He stepped from the window to see Gabby Gratiot laying a meal on the table. "Man, you feeds your prisoners, I'll say. This chow is from the Chinaman's, ain't it?"

"Yep, and old sandal-foot How Long told me to tell you it's on him; he was cook for your daddy, two seasons. Have you read much? That 'Henry the Fourth' is quite a book. Falstaff's in that volume."

"The fellow what made that foamy beer?"

"Say, you hobble-brained, mind-dark, keerless young fool, Sir John Falstaff is an im-mortul, made by Shakespeare."

"Then how come Shakespeare to kill him?"

CHAPTER X.

MOB SPIRIT.

THE night settled slowly over the town.

And the jail was filled with men; short men, tall men, men that were grizzled and men who were whiskerless. These sat around smoking and waiting. And the ridiculous feature was that save for a candle on a table, there was no light. Grouped about that table six men played cards. At length one said in a tone of disgust, "I'm so broke I rattle. I quits."

"You wasn't so dirty," said another player.

"Call in one of them prisoners—that big Swede's got money," said Gabby. Some one yelled "Ole!" and a tall blond man walked out of the cell-room which was at the side of Harley's place of confinement. "Ay ban sleepin'," grouched Ole. "Y'u fallers want for play Solo?"

"Sit down," said Gabby. "This is Mistigris, you savvy?"

"Ay onderstan'. Poker with joker an' by yiminy he runs wild. Ay ban lucky sometam wid Mister-grease."

"I'll say he has," interjected Gabby. "He's put my mill on a losing basis, for the last three weeks. But he goes out next Monday, week. Cards!"

The game went on, and save for the faintest sound, occasionally, which told of the fireman in the boiler room of the mill at the work of keeping steam up, no sound broke the monotony of the slapping cards. Then came Ague's voice, outside the door. "Douse that glim," he said. "The stage is just pulling into town."

The game ended. Ole had won sixty dollars.

"Ay ban talking," said Ole ponderously, "wid Mex boys, and oder fallers in yail-room; an' dese boys say maybe ven fon begins, y'u give us chance hav some fon, too. Y'u get Ole a pick-handle, he show you fallers how Svade man play yumpin' Yupiter wid de heads of dis mob."

"Don't worry," said Gabby, putting out the light, "when the dance begins all you prisoners have got to take a hand. I've got plenty guns."

"Ay don't vant gun. Ay only vant for pick-handle an' place for straddle out my laigs. Ven you say, 'Go, Ole!' I begin!"

Bill Jim John knocked on the door and Gabby let him in. In the dark Bill Jim John could be heard punching a hole in the wall which lay between the boiler room of the mill and the outer regions of the jail beside its front door. Then a voice, muffled and deep, came into the room. "It's through! Shove in your pipe."

Harley peered into the darkness, listening to the sound of metal rasping against metal. The cigarettes of the men in the room, glowed in a rectangular pattern about the walls.

A chap next to Harley's door heard him move.

"Didja eat, Harley?" he asked, tenderly.

"I'll say he did," replied Gabby. "He ain't got no grave-yard stomach. And there's nothing futile about his appetite."

"All done," announced Bill Jim John. "Bring on your mob."

"Listen," some one said. "You won't have to wait long!"

From the main section of Fraternity there arose a deep rumble, then quick staccato cries. Somewhere a pistol shot rang out, then a stillness came. A man staring from the front window announced morosely. "They're flocking into the Beuna Vista. That looks bad."

"They can get mighty high on Crow's cyanide," commented Gabby. "I wish I had some of it."

"Here's my canteen, Gabby, I filled it up at Ague's. This brand ain't so bad. It'll float a high tooth," a voice added, "and every drink after the third adds two hands in height to any man. Here, help yourself. Us fellows brought plenty. We didn't know but what the bars would be closed when we got done with this trick."

UP at the Buena Vista mob spirit was surely holding sway.

Alonzo Crow stood on his bar reciting the murder of Jake Craven. Sliver Skinker and Tub Webb leaned against the rail under him, adding confirmation to his narrative. The drinks went round and round. Sliver bought, Tub, and Alonzo. The strong whisky ran like water. If a man asked for beer he was withered with a look and a glassful of bourbon was placed in his hands.

"Now to add up all this evidence, boys," yelled Crow; "Jake was found shot three times in the back. His horse had stomped the ground at the bars; Jake was trying to get into or out of his yard, I don't know which; but there were the marks of the wheeling his pony had done. Then the conchas we picked up! They come off Harley Doon's saddle. Everybody knows them silver things. Here's one of 'em! Give it to me, Silver Dollar!" The stage driver lifted a silver object which Crow exhibited to the mob below him.

Bruno jumped through a rear door.

"Here's another!" he cried. "I just

cut it off Harley's saddle which Bill Jim John hid in his tack room. I was a laying in a stall, and I heard this Harley tell Bill Jim John he was in a jam over Jake's death and that six conchas was missing from his fancy saddle."

"They match!" screamed Alonzo Crow, comparing the two conchas as Bruno handed him the one he had secured at Bill Jim John's stable. "But wait! We gotta go slow, and I want you-all to hear the evidence complete, before you make your verdict! The tracks in the dirt about Jake's gate, mind you, now, the tracks right near where Jake pin-wheeled and tried to get away, showed that the fellow what pulled down on Jake rode a horse with a missing shoe! That horse we tracked down the road to where it turned off and took a short cut to Meacham, beating the stage by at least an hour.

"In the bushes off that trail I picked up this iron box what Jake used as a cache for his money; and Harley Doon shod his bronc with a left hind shoe at Meacham. He did, I tell you! He shod it at Harry Fultze's place, and then come on in here. Harry Fultze wouldn't let me telephone to you boys, or we'd of had this thing done with by now and all of us celebrating! And Harry brought an armful of guns with him and a case of shells! What's the verdict, men? Does we or does we not pro-tect the fair name of Fraternity?"

"You does not!" cried a voice from the door. "Excuse me, when I'm excited I gotta cough a little!"

The sound of Ague's familiar cough hacked in the utter quiet that fell as his challenge sounded in the room. "Are you trying, Alonzo," Ague asked, a quiet menace to his words, "to make wolves out of these boys?"

"I ain't trying to do nothing. I seen what I seen, and I told what was what, and these boys can think what they think."

"Yes, but how come you giving free drinks all over this place? You ain't become a grandpa, is you?" Ague's dry sarcasm cut like a knife. "You didn't take a legal wedded wife, on this trip, didja?"

"Nope! Look here, Ague, looks as if you're in on this, too. Jake played his celebration, mostly, at your place. Maybe he told you just where he hid his money what he got from the San Jacinto people."

"You pasty-faced, white-livered lobo, you take back that insinuation, or you'll bump into the society of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, The Acts, and The Romans, right soon!" There was no sign of cough or weakness in Ague's voice. "Take that back, Alonzo! I'm just itching to touch off Susan Betsy and scatter you full of slugs."

"Well—I shouldn't have said that, Ague. These is excited times." Crow retreated and jumped from the bar. Sliver looked at Tub, then both men started for the door.

"WAIT, you two!" snapped Ague. "Stand over there, on that side, all by your lonesomes. I wants to talk to you birds." Sliver and Tub took the position Ague indicated. "Where's Splay-foot?"

"Somewheres above the Circle Four," Sliver replied quickly. "We was on our way to meet him when we bumped into this murder and thought we'd help out the sheriff of this county."

"By parading your broncs and three pack horses all over them tracks in the road, eh? That don't smell good to me!

How do we know Splay-foot and you boys didn't do this job?"

"Splay-foot aimed to talk to his girl Sadie from either the Circle Four or the old Forest Fire Station beyond the Circle Four. Why don't you call the phone company at Amity and find out?"

"That's fair enough," yelled Silver Dollar.

"Fly at it, Ague. You raised this question!" yelled Crow.

Ague was suspicious, but said: "All right, I will. Sliver, you and Tub walk up the street ahead of me. And all you boys, in this place, you stays here. I've got fifteen men in the street with scatter-guns, and I've told 'em to open up on anybody coming out that door, after I left. I'm going to take these deputies to the phone and bring 'em back here. What I hears I'll tell you. If Splay-foot was at the Fire Station to-day, that lets *him* out. If he wasn't, well, we lets you boys make up your mind."

Ague walked to the store which held the phone. Here he called Amity. Sadie answered.

"Honey," said Ague, "a question has come up. Sliver Skinker and Tub Webb are here beside me, and they say that Splay-foot Moss is somewhere up near the Forest Service Fire Station. He said to them that he would call you when he got there. Tell me, have you heard from him?"

"Yes, Ague, I heard from him at Number Three station, at seven minutes to three to-day. I know the time, for he asked me to give it to him. Why, what's wrong with Splay-foot?"

"Nothing, if he was at the Fire Station. A whole lot if he wasn't."

"Do they really accuse Harley?"

"Sadie, they are wolves in this town to-night. I sure wish Tom McGibbon was here."

"He'll be there in the morning. He's started, a long time ago, and has a posse with him. He told me to arrange change horses for him, and they're waiting every ten miles to Jake's place. He'll get fresh ones at Meacham, and ought to be in Fraternity the first thing in the morning after investigating Jake's place. Is Harley in danger, really?"

"He's in jail, if that's what you mean."

"Who suspects Splay-foot?"

"I do, Sadie—every move he makes. And even if I saw him myself at Fire Station at seven minutes to three to-day, I wouldn't believe him. I've played my hunches all my life, and I'm playing this one. Harley Doon never murdered no man. And he couldn't pull a low-down trick if he tried. But a man who'll show a silly girl's letters to a bunch of men in a saloon will shove little ducks into the water; he'd go the limit, without pulling off his shirt. That Splay-foot wears a coat of many colors, most of which are yellow."

Something mighty like a sob came over the wire to Ague.

"Sadie," he added, "there's a boy's life hanging on this evidence. If you hears of anything that can help, telephone me, will you?"

"I—will, Ague! I sure—will!"

BACK up the street went Ague and Sliver and Tub, and into the Buena Vista.

"Boys," said Sliver exultantly, "I was standing right at Ague's ear, and I heard Sadie tell him that Splay-foot talked with her from the Forest Service Fire Station at seven minutes to three this afternoon. Ain't that so, Ague?"

Ague nodded a grudging affirma-

tive; held up a hand that signified he wanted silence.

"Men," he said, "this looks bad, I admit. But I'm Harley's friend. I knows what blood is in him. He didn't do that killing, and I won't stand to have him hung, sudden. He'll get a trial. The county judge is here; we can get a clean, quick jury, and Tom McGibbon will be here in the morning. I want you fellows to wait now and not cause a lot of blood to run in these streets; for Harley's friends are going to stand by him as long as they last."

"Yeh?" snarled Alonzo Crow. "And by morning that hard-boiled Circle Four will be riding here ready to smoke this town so hot a magpie can't fly over it. Once Harley's pals get into Fraternity the law has to take its course; and that law is the Circle Four law, and nothing else or less. Get out, Ague! You played your hand and we waited. Now we wants this place to house only those who have the best interests of the town at heart."

Ague walked into the street. Here he motioned for his watchers and with them went to the All Aboard.

"Boys," he said, "I done the best I could. Now it's fight, I reckon. We're forty against at least a hundred. I knows I'm speaking for Harley Doon when I says that if any of you-all wants to put up your guns and go home, it 'll be all right! If you stays, that 'll be sure splendid. Here's the time to let me know. Them as wants to go home, walk out that door."

Not a man stirred. Ague smiled.

"Excuse me, when I'm excited I cough a little," he began, a pitiful smile struggling over his lips, which were twisting into a sob. He choked; he could go no further. His eyes filled with tears.

"Why, you old hawk, you're crying," yelled Jerry. "Did you think we are afraid of the odds? Forty to a hundred gives Crow and Sliver and Tub and their fellows just about the right sort of handicap. Now you settle and start coughing. I'd rather hear you cough, any time, than to hear Patti sing 'Coming Through the Rye'!"

"All right," Ague smiled and coughed. "Rye it is, boys. Belly up to this bar and drink one to Harley Doon!"

But the men in the room couldn't stand it. Two drinks and they were patrolling the streets.

Something had taken place at the Buena Vista. It was nearly empty. Crow's followers had gone to their homes. At length Crow appeared and asked Ague and his men to take a drink on him. Ague waved his boys inside. And when the glasses were filled Crow said:

"Boys, we all decided that Ague was right. The law is in town, and Tom McGibbon will be here in the morning. We've given up talking about this case until we sees which way the cat jumps. But Tom McGibbon ain't going to be allowed to take Harley Doon out of this town. He hangs here if he's guilty; he goes free if he can prove himself innocent."

"That's fine," said Ague, "but us boys keeps pulling up our feet and putting 'em down, all the long night through. If you fellows changed your minds once, you might somersault that opinion. Good licker you dealt us that time, Alonzo. Good night!"

Over in a corner Tub Webb said to Sliver, as they sat alone, "That old wart-hog may be half dead with the breathing-bugs that are suffocating him; but if you and me have a gnat's eyebrow of sense we'll saddle up and

put some sand between us and this saltpeter town. I don't like the cocksure air of Ague."

"Run?" Sliver grimaced. "I should mutter not! We've got 'em lashed to the mast. Boy, don't you know when you've got a gift from heaven?"

"Mark what I tell you. I knows that if Tom McGibbon ever corners you and me and makes us tell our stories that we'll cement up each other, sure. We haven't had time yet to fix up a two-man story of what we seen and done. Splay-foot left us too fast. But if they snares him—"

CHAPTER XI.

JUDGE LYNCH.

TWO patrols sentineled the streets of Fraternity that night. One was under the leadership of Ague; the other was captained alternately by Sliver and Alfonso Snow. Yet neither approached the jail.

Bruno had alarmed the Buena Vista following, but while he had been arousing it Ague had assembled trusted men who secretly had filed inside the jail. The Snow faction was oblivious of the fact that so many men were already inside the town's bastile. During the night, as Ague's band walked the streets, Snow's men watched only that none of them attempted to rescue Harley Doon. Otherwise the espionage had no significance.

Toward dawn both sides withdrew members until at last but three men of each faction remained as sentries. And these finally sat down together a block from the jail and smoked in genial association. When the false dawn was due and the east grown intensely black, some one called attention to the texture of the sky.

"False dawn's come, that's all. Always darkest on the desert about this time," a Snow adherent said.

"Nope, look at that. That's lightning, and them's thunderheads. Boy, they're coming, what I mean! Look! Why, the dern things are most on top of us!"

It was true. A storm had crept over the horizon. The air cleared, a new feel was in it. Rain was due; and rain at that level of the desert, at that time of the year, was an unprecedented event. The men chattered like boys.

Then day came at last. While the sun was obscured, daylight filtered through the great clouds, giving to them the appearance of charging monsters galloping down on the hills. Hanging from these, like great purple-gray bags, were sheets of falling rain.

"I reckon that makes it hard on Harley," said one of Ague's men. "That rain took away his last chance."

"Whatta you mean?" objected a Snow partisan. "Say, this will smear out his tracks, and unless Tom McGibbon has seen them tracks, by lantern light, that killing-kid is lucky. But if that old tracking wolf, Tom McGibbon, gets a look at a horse or man track he'll have some weight with a jury when he tells what he saw."

A few spattering drops fell from the sky. In fifteen minutes the gutters ran red with the hill-wash of the storm. How that rain fell! And how long it maintained its deluge!

Never had the like been seen; and all this meant more grass, better cows, more beef, and more money, over the entire region. The town was up before the sun was an hour high. Then there came a man running into the street from the store where the telephone was installed.

"Hi, everybody!" he yelled. "Tom

McGibbon is coming. He sent a rider to Meacham. He'll be here as soon as he's had a daylight look around Jake's place."

That ended the vigil. The tired watchers, all of them, went to bed. In the jail the guards slept on the floor. Slant-eyed How Long took advantage of the rain to make four trips, under his inevitable big black cotton umbrella, carrying grub to Harley's protectors.

Six o'clock, seven, eight o'clock came. Then, out of the east, and coming through the falling rain, appeared eight slicker-clad horsemen, dashing down the street. Tom McGibbon was at their head.

He went directly to see County Judge Teller, who informed him of the suppressed danger which lay in the attitude of Fraternity's factions. He advised caution. Tom McGibbon was all for transferring Harley to Amity at once, for safe keeping; but the judge warned against the attempt. Tom decided to interview the prisoner and after that to call the citizens together and make an appeal to allow an orderly trial of the case to take place.

The sheriff knew he was outnumbered, but he also knew that if he could persuade the Crow crowd by showing that he had an iron-clad case against Harley, Ague and his men would not object to the moving of the prisoner under proper escort. Judge Teller agreed to the experiment.

TOM McGIBBON went alone to the jail. In thirty minutes he was seen coming out. Now the rain had ceased and the sun was streaming through rifts in the clouds. Already vapor was arising from the bottom lands, while high hills were yet covered with slowly moving rain-clouds.

The partisans of both factions formed around the flagpole which occupied the center of the square. Tom McGibbon began to talk. Standing on the outer edge of the crowd were Alonzo Crow, Sliver, and Tub Webb. Sneers flecked their lips; but they listened carefully to all the sheriff said.

"Boys, I'm your sheriff. You-all elected me, without opposition. I've held down this office eight years. I know many of you as friends. Now, listen: I've got a good case, circumstantial, of course, but nevertheless a good case, against Harley Doon. I arrived at Jake's place this morning, shortly after midnight. With lanterns I examined all the horse sign. I found Harley had been watching Jake's place from a clump of trees above it. These tracks might have been a day or two old; but the shoes that made them were those of the bronc what had lost the left hind plate. And under them trees I found another concha." A murmur ran through Crow's gang.

"I tracked that pony from the well down the irrigation-ditch to the road. That's the way he got away after getting the money. He caught Jake going into his bars, and Jake tried to get away from him. That's clear, from the tromping Jake's horse did at them bars. As Harley passed the stage, four men, in that coach, saw him; all good men, too. He flung the cash box in the brush along the trail he took to Meacham and got his horse shod at Harry Fultze's." McGibbon paused impressively.

"But here's the clincher. Listen to this! On the wall of Jake's kitchen, where there was some half-fresh paint, I found the whole print of a man's hand. I've learned finger-printing, and I studied that hand-impression on Jake's wall. I fixed it definitely in my

mind. Just now I've come from the jail. Harley won't talk; but I seen his hand and it's the same one that made that print on Jake Craven's wall, under a high shelf."

An audible cry of astonishment and admiration for their sheriff came from the crowd. McGibbon continued:

"Boys, now you know what I've learned, I want you to disperse and go home. I'm aiming to take Harley Doon to Amity, where we can get an unbiased jury; try him, and get justice. If you try him in this end of the county, and convict him, unless you lynch him, he'll get a new trial; and there's danger in such procedure. Are you with me?"

"No!" yelled Alonzo Crow. "Try him here, and right now!"

"But I tell you, boys, it won't stand!"

"We'll make it stand," shouted Crow.

"Agree to anything," whispered Judge Teller. "Ague tells me that Sadie has just phoned that she notified Wind River Andy last night and that the Circle Four is on its way here."

"Boys," cried Tom McGibbon. "Have it your way! I'm going to breakfast. After me and my men eat, we'll proceed."

The crowd milled about. Sliver and Tub Webb sauntered off to the end of the block, walked down it, turned into an alley and entered the Buena Vista by a side door. Alonzo Crow met them.

"THE slick devil," said Crow. "You see what he figgers on, don't you? That Circle Four gang. Well, he won't work it. I've sent out the boys. They're getting ready; and at a sign from me they will move. It's all right, we're going through with it, this time. I've got ten men on roofs and at the first bobble from Ague's crew, we drops them as they start to interfere. We've got the wagons and a twelve-inch thick, eighteen-foot long pitch-pole to batter down the jail door. In five minutes it will be all over."

"How about Tom McGibbon?" asked Tub, his face the color of dead ashes. "He's got some salty guys with him."

"He's going to eat in the dining room of the hotel. I've sent a man to get some boys to cover him and his deputies with guns. My men will stick their smoke-poles through windows on both sides of that dining room. That's a cinch. Tom is already inside the hotel, and his guns are leaning up against the office wall. You fellows, to save your own skins, you go over to the hotel and get to talking with Judge Teller. You may need him, later. That way, if you are suspected, it 'll quiet down Ague and his mob. The Circle Four is riding this way, and what has delayed them I can't tell."

"How did you find that out?" exploded Tub.

"That souse Bruno heard Juge Teller tell McGibbon that Sadie Majors had phoned Ague she had notified Wind River Andy last night."

Tub Webb's face changed to a sick green.

"Say," snapped Sliver, "what's eating your liver? You look to me like something about to squawk! And if you does, I'll blow your head off! Go on, Alonzo. Tub and me is going over to Judge Teller. How 'll we get out of here?"

"The same way you got in. You won't know a thing till I comes to my door, pulls my handkerchief and blows

my nose. I'll be watched by boys everywhere, and these will run to their positions and the play is on. Don't be nervous, now; Ague is like a weasel. The least flicker of an eyelash and he'll smell something and move to that jail."

"Come on, Tub, it 'll soon be over," sneered Sliver.

The main street was filled. The alley down which they walked resounded with the dismal echo of Sliver's and Tub's boots. Neither spoke. They walked in a deep abstraction, and as they approached a cement water-trough, back of a livery stable, Ague and Jerry arose and covered them with revolvers.

"We want you babies," said Ague. "Just amble along, across the street, go on down the opposite alley. You're going to my place."

Sliver it was now, who turned a quivering wretch. He wanted to talk: but Ague's gun, poked in his ribs, shut him up. Quickly, and without the appearance of covering the men with weapons, for they held these out of sight beneath their coats, Ague and Jerry marched Sliver and Tub to the All Aboard and across the street into the store where the phone hung to the wall, its receiver down.

Here six or eight armed men were seen. Tub was in a frenzy of fright. He wanted to tell all he knew then; but Ague took up the receiver:

"Hello, Sadie, now tell me just what you did a few moments ago."

Ague held the receiver between the ears of Sliver and Tub, who stood closely together. The other men in the room made a solid circle of heads about the phone. Then came the voice of a girl, musical, faint, but clear, very clear, just as a distant echo, filtered by the air, is sometimes audible:

"Splay-foot was not at the Fire Station yesterday. For the last few days he has said he was telephoning me from the fire-boxes. A few moments ago the Chief Forest Ranger came here and told the superintendent that he had removed all telephone apparatus from the Fire Station and the fire-boxes. The Forest Service is going to change its line. The removal work was done six weeks ago, and he and his men have been working over in the Big River country."

"AGUE! Come on! They've got the drop on Tom McGibbon and his men and are in front of the jail now," yelled a man bursting into the back door of the saloon.

"Good-by, Sadie," yelled Ague into the transmitter and hung up. "Three of you fellows guard these jaspers. The rest of you come with me." He made as if to jump into the street.

"Not that way," yelled the man who had just entered. "They are squatting on roofs, and the street is paved with hidden guns. Let's go up the alley."

"Where's the county judge?" yelled Ague.

"There ain't no county judge. Judge Lynch done took his place."

"Whoa! I forgot something," smiled Ague. "All you birds quiet down and listen. When you hear that daggoned siren-whistle on the alfalfa mill you'll know somebody's getting the ding-battenest trimming anybody ever see in this end of the universe. I plumb forgot about that. Sit down, everybody!"

Tub Webb's Adam's apple jumped up and down in this throat, suggesting a bobber worked grotesquely on a string. Sliver Skinker seemed to wilt, from the hips down, and to prevent a fall dropped to a packing box.

From the outside there came no sound.

The sinister silence, however, had no dismaying effect upon Ague. His thin lips worked into a smile, his pallid cheeks had an unhealthy color.

"Now, listen, it'll come, most any time! Lord, but I wish I could see it!" he exulted. "Right here and now is where they make old Judge Lynch flinch and wince. Yep, after to-day he'll be a quince!"

CHAPTER XII.

A HOT FINISH.

THE glorious processes of youth rioting throughout Harley Doon's magnificent body had kept the cowboy undismayed. Much of the night he had slept, while those who watched outside of his cell kept a silent, cigarette-smoking vigil.

As the night wore on and the mob made no rush the guardsmen fell to sleep, one by one. When the rain came every one awoke. Rain, in May, at that spot, had the effect of the miraculous upon all desert men. It was an incomprehensible thing, and a huge delight as well.

Soon Gabby saw Tom McGibbon stalking toward the jail.

The sheriff was admitted. And when he saw the numbers of the men inside he was amazed. Most of these he knew, and after greeting them, he and Gabby went to Harley's cell.

"Now, Harley, you tell me about this thing," urged McGibbon, as a father would speak to a son. "Tell it to me from the time you left your horse camp to look for grass on your way to Amity."

And Harley did tell him, down to the least detail.

"So you went in the kitchen, reached up to the shelf for them letters, got 'em and left, going down the ditch to the road," repeated Tom McGibbon.

"Did you, by any chance, lay a hand ag'in the wall under that shelf?"

"Yes, and got smeared with Jake's bum job of paint mixing, too!"

"One thing more. Did you stop and look at Jake's house on that little ledge above it?"

"Yes. I didn't see him around, so I stopped in a clump of jack pine and 'halloed' to him. What's wrong with that?"

"You lost a concha there, that's all. Boy, we'll get you to Amity, out of the clutches of these boa constrictors, then we'll figure on how to clear up all this evidence against you. I'm going out now, and you get ready to move."

Gabby watched the sheriff walk to the flagpole, saw him still the crowd, knew that he was talking and then saw that whatever he had said to that mob had not been effectual. The very sound of anger in the air conveyed to him an alarm.

"Get ready, now it's our time," the millman-jailer said. "By George, looka yonder! Up that way and over here! They're going to come at us back of wagons we can't perforate," he said excitedly. "Are you all set, Bill Jim John?"

"All set? I should say I was! And I'm r'aring to go. You got them cloths?"

"Yep. Plenty of 'em, right by the holes in the door. Which nozzle does I take, Bill Jim John?"

"This one, Gabby, and lay it right under that little window so's all you gotta do is hold it, keep your hands cool, with them cloths, and move her sidewise, just a little. Keep the nozzle down, and your head out of sight!"

"Ay tank ay see wagon move," announced Ole. "Gif Ole pick-handle. All y'u boys stand back. Ole takes care of door!"

"Keep your shirt on, Ole, you won't get a chance to work till we heats 'em up a little. There's your pick handle, by my desk, only it is an unironed single tree," said Gabby. "Here they come, they're right on top of us! Now, boys, no killing, until they bust in the door, then give it to 'em between the hip and the shoulder, don't try no wing or head shots. I want belly-centers, every time. But not a crack of a gun until I fires first."

Six wagons, three on a side, rushed toward the jail in the form of a flying V, its point toward the jail door. The vehicles were moved and guided by the invisible men working the wheels on their far sides.

In less than half a minute the wagons formed a perfect barricade for the men behind them. The jail door was at the apex of the V, and here was a two-foot opening which would permit assault without danger directly upon the door.

The men slung a log to the ground from two wagons where it had been lashed. Then out came a two-legged crane which was chained to wagon hubs. The pole was lifted, a log-chain hitched about it, and this passed to a ring at the top of the crane. The jail-end of the log swung free. In a few seconds that ingenious battering ram had been set in place. And it was a formidable-looking engine of destruction.

ALONZO CROW stood in the areaway back of the crane, and behind him twenty-five other men were jammed in that small triangular spot between the wagons.

"Open that door, Gabby. I want to talk with you!" Crow yelled.

A hole in the door appeared, along about its middle, and here a human eye came into view.

"What you expect to do with that thing?" asked Gabby.

"Bust in that door. We want Harley Doon and we want him quick. We've cornered Tom McGibbon and his deputies, and we've got this town fixed, every which ways. There ain't no use, Gabby. We mean business."

The men back of Alonzo Crow packed themselves into a compact mass, every face straining toward the spot where the eye was showing. They seemed to have become hypnotized by that hidden orb. Now, as they looked, the eye vanished and a thing of brass appeared. Out of this came a hurtling, sizzling mass of steam and boiling water.

Alonzo Crow was struck full in the face and breast by the furious blast, and screamed in animal-like agony. Those back of him tried to avoid the fury of that hissing assault, but on it poured relentlessly. Then over the wagons, and coming from a small high barred window there fell another downpour into the wedge of humans between the wagons. This sent them forward to the spot where Alonzo Crow was jammed against the crane.

That second assault of the fiery fluid conveyed the impression to the tortured men that they were being attacked from the rear. They dropped to the ground, but the steam and scalding water hit them where they fell, unescapably. Half of their number were blinded, others were wedged between wheels and wagon boxes so that they could neither back, go forward or drop.

Then, as if to add to the demoniacal

unreality of this unseen agony which was flaying the very flesh from their bodies, a hideous screaming dinned into their ears. The siren of Gabby's alfalfa mill was being blown; and it sounded like a mockery.

Friends and confederates of the mob by the wagons, rushed into the middle of the street, and stared helplessly across the square to where the jail stood. They were appalled by what they saw, yet not a man of them was resolute enough to attempt a rescue.

Of a sudden they looked up at the hills which fell down directly upon the town site, back of the jail.

The shrieking siren was filling the air with its hellish sound, and the men in between the wagons were dropping inert to the earth.

"That's enough," yelled Bill Jim John; "they've got a plenty!" The siren stilled, but its screeching echo held. Then out of the region at which the men in the street had been staring, there rang a cry of utter and challenging exultation. It slapped the air with an infectious gladsomeness; it sent the men in the business section hurrying and scurrying into buildings; it made others jump into saddles and tear away toward homes in the outskirts.

"*Hiiiiiii! Yiiiiiii! Eeeeee! Circle Four!*"

The Circle Four was come to town!

That news spread like a plague throughout the ranks of the Crow gang. The members of that band fell away from each other as if each bore some hateful contagion. The men who had poked their guns through the windows of the dining room where Tom McGibbon and his deputies sat at breakfast, now dropped their weapons and fled in paralyzing fright.

The Circle Four was come to town!

This phrase went from one end of Fraternity to the other. And with it went all the fight and fury of the Crow mob.

Gabby, Bill Jim John, Ole and others flocked out of the jail and saw that the poor devils between the wagons, now clawing at their scalded faces and hands and bodies, were incapable of harm. The defenders now rushed around the jail and watched the bunch of cowboys come sliding down from the hills. Wind River Andy was in the lead, and back of him, tied to a saddle, his horse being led by Wind River, appeared the figure of Splayfoot Moss.

"Hot ziggity!" yelled Bill Jim John. "Look at them rannihans ride. They organizes slow, them boys, but when they gets to rolling, don't they step?"

"She worked, Bill Jim John," laughed Gabby. "But I didn't think she was going to."

"Didn't I tell you I was a plumber? All I did was to feed water and steam into the same pipe, the water ahead of a hundred pounds of steam. That 'd blow all the sin off Billy the Kid, and make him as harmless as Little Lord Fauntleroy. But see who Wind River's got. That old hawk don't care who he brings to town, does he?"

"Ay tank I go back and get some sleep," said Ole. "Y'u fallers make Ole sick. Hot vater and steam! Ay tank he's not so moch fon as plenty heads for pick-handle."

He turned back into the jail in obvious disgust.

"WHAT kept you rannihans so long?" yelled Ague to the Circle Four boys as he walked up to the jail with Sliver and Tub Webb. "Wasn't you notified by Sadie last night?"

"Sure," said Wind River; "but we bumped into Splay-foot along about two o'clock this morning, and Step-and-a-half recognized his horse. He was coming this way when we seen him, but hearing us pounding back of him, he jumped into the trees and it took us dern near an hour to get him.

"He was gone plumb away, for his bronc was near fresh, and ours was tired, when all of a sudden Wee Willie seen a horse without a rider. Splay-foot's pony had stumbled, and Splay-foot had been knocked silly. We come up on him, and, holy smoke, as soon as he seen who it was, I wish you could have seen the look in his eyes. His saddlebags are stuffed plumb full of tenderfoot money. You never seen so many frog-bellies in all your life. Where's Harley?"

"Here I am, old Worthless," Harley greeted from the jail door. "You boys look good and ugly! But I'll tell a man you sure looks like a circus has come to town for me, too."

Tom McGibbon came up. He was grim, sore, serious.

He asked but few questions—found out what he wanted, then took Ague and Wind River Andy aside.

"Boys," he said, "I've got to get these side-winders out of town. Will you help me?"

"You bet," said Ague. Andy nodded agreement. "Tom, I can't ride to Amity, I ain't got lungs enough; but I would like to know what Splay-foot did with that phone contraption he had. I wants that thing, Tom, that's my reward. Maybe Splay-foot will tell you what he done with it. Tub Webb told me it sure would work any place, any time. All you had to do was hang it up on the wires, twist its tail, and there you have central!"

Tom McGibbon walked over to Splay-foot.

"Where'd you hide that phone business you used?" he asked. "Sliver and Tub have told us all about it."

"I dropped it in Hour Glass Pool," mumbled Splay-foot. "And that's what got me caught. I was going good, and then got to worrying about that. The first thing I knew I was lost. Then I seen the Circle Four coming behind me. If I hadn't seen that nickel-plated receiver staring at me from the bottom of the pool, after I dropped it, I'd have come into this town and brazened this thing out. But that dern thing haunted me like a ghost and kept with me all night."

McGibbon's men rounded up the scalded members of the mob and carried them to the doctor. In an hour Fraternity had settled back to its wonted peace, and except for a great throng in the All Aboard, where much singing was going on, one would have thought Fraternity was spending a normal, matter of fact Sunday.

AGUE found time to telephone Sadie the news. And from her he learned of the sudden about-face she had made in the matter of her fondness for Splay-foot.

"Harley," Ague said, returning to the All Aboard, "Sadie Majors is waiting on the wire across the street. I told her you wanted to thank her for what she did for you. If it hadn't been for her, cowboy, maybe we wouldn't of snared all these fellows. Anyhow, podner, Sadie feels kind of blue. She thought she was giving her heart to a real McCoy, and all she done was to get a tin-foil, sin-warped, human runt. Go over and cheer her up."

And Harley went.

"Hello, Sadie," he said. "How are you?"

"Harley . . . Ever since you sent me that box of candy I have kept the card before me on this switchboard. I'm—oh, I'm so sorry for what I said to you the last time we met. Will you forgive me?"

"Sure, Sadie. And thank you for calling up with that news about the fire."

"And, Harley, I think I understand about what you meant in that note. I know you're not stuck on me. I reckon no man would be, after what I did to you!"

"Aw—I'm not sore, really, Sadie . . . The next time I come to Amity I'll fetch along a little bitty four-year-old pinto what is as cute as a bug's ear; steps spirited, and looks like a lady's horse, right. He's built to order for you, and I'd like to see you on his back . . . Will you go riding with me if I come over some time?"

"Will I? Say, Harley, you're *real*, you are!"

"Shucks! You'll get in the mud, Sadie, if you talk to me thataway! See you some time!"

"Good-by!"

"*Adios!*"

THE END.

There Are Such Things

"ONCE in a blue moon." How often that expression has been used! On reading it or hearing the words spoken, one merely considers it a simile for something so remote that it is almost an impossibility.

A blue moon sounds a bit fantastic when considered as an actual fact. Yet there have been times when such a thing as a blue moon has really been seen. Some years ago that unusual spectacle was actually observed in Bombay. At the time the moon first seemed pale blue, and finally turned to a greenish shade before returning to its normal color. No doubt this phenomenon was created by some strange condition of the local atmosphere at the time.

Blue moons are not as rare as one might think. There are instances when they have been observed in England and also in Italy and Austria. Famous astronomers have reported observing large bands of green in the moon, so those who once stated that the moon was made of green cheese were not so far wrong when it came to color.

What is even more unusual than such a strange-hued moon is a blue sun. It is believed that there is only one instance recorded of such a phenomenon. This happened in Java in 1883 and came as the aftermath of one of the greatest volcanic convulsions recorded. This was the time when a good portion of Krakatoa Island, in the Strait of Sunda, exploded and vanished.

For a time the sun was completely hidden by the huge clouds of smoke and dust. When it eventually became visible it was the color of the deep blue sea—though usually when seen through a cloud of smoke the sun seems red. It remained a deep blue until the coming of night.

W. C. Sprong.

"There," said Domino, surveying the victims ruefully, "goes the record of the Trans-Mountain Air Express for safety"

Domino Craves a Thrill

"Reliable commercial aviation" was turning flyers into kiddie-car operators, according to pilot Domino Jones—and then along came two men on a bandit hunt

By CHARLES WINFIELD FESSIER

DOMINO JONES snorted as he gazed morosely at the seven-place cabin job that stood on the line. "They don't want an aviator for this job. What they need's a street car motorman. First time it looks like I'm going to have a bit of real flying to do, the office reads in the morning paper that it's going to rain, and the trip's called off. Say, know where I can get a job driving an old lady's flivver coupé? That'd be a damn sight more exciting than this."

"Now, listen," argued Mr. Campbell. "The Trans-Mountain Air Express didn't hire you for the purpose of giving you a good time. There's bad weather over the Ridge, and the flight's off. We can't afford to risk the lives of our passengers just to please you."

"Why can't you?" asked Domino savagely.

"Why can't we what?" the superintendent wanted to know.

"Why can't you afford to risk the passengers' lives?" demanded Domino. "I'd just as soon take a chance and then it'd be my neck and not the office's. What kind of passengers do we carry anyway? Two or three fat traveling salesmen and a coupla bleary-eyed

old women with pooches. The dogs aren't worth much; and as for those women—say, if they should happen to be in a falling plane, it'd do 'em good. Maybe they'd wake up and find out they were alive before they got all mixed up with the fuselage. Another thing," went on Domino: "Old folks with weak hearts are all that'll ride in one of our airplanes. Why? Just because we give 'em the most thrill-proof and uninteresting method of transportation yet devised outside of a kiddie car. People that want a thrill drive their own cars over the Ridge Route, instead of riding with us. Then they'll have the kick of taking a chance on being shoved off to glory by a drunken driver from Bakersfield."

"The flight's off, I tell you," stated Mr. Campbell. "We don't fly over the Ridge to-day. If you want a thrill, go start a Ku Klux Klan chapter in Timbuctoo."

"Tell the office," Domino shouted after his retreating form, "to go and hire themselves a Boy Scout to pilot this parlor car of theirs. I'm going to quit this here job and get one where I can fly whether it rains or not."

HAVING upheld his end of the argument Domino sat on a box and wished something would happen so he wouldn't have to spend the day watching lucky airmail pilots taking off and setting down on the Los Angeles field. He'd about decided to go watch the horseshoe tournament in Long Beach when the detested Campbell dashed out to the field suffering from a violent outbreak of excitement.

"Listen, lumberdome," Campbell gasped. "You want to fly to-day, eh?"

"Oh, dear, no," stated Domino bitterly. "It might rain and I'd catch cold."

"Well, you're going to fly," stated the pleasant Mr. Campbell, "because we got an emergency job for you."

Interested in spite of himself, Domino inquired if the job had something to do with carrying an umbrella for the mail plane.

"Shut up," pleaded Campbell, "and listen. They've got Big Troth's gang cornered in an abandoned mine tunnel near Caliente. They think Big Troth himself is in the trap too. The sheriff of Kern County phoned into the Los Angeles sheriff's office and asked for some tear-gas bombs."

"That's a dirty shame," stated Domino, striving to conceal his growing excitement.

"What's a dirty shame?" inquired the mystified Mr. Campbell.

"To make the Big Troth gang cry. Why do they want to use tear bombs on 'em for and who's Big Troth? Did he raid a hot dog stand?"

"It won't be so funny when you get there," was Campbell's savage promise. "There's likely to be shooting. This Big Troth is one tough tomato and I don't mean catsup. He's been raising merry hell around here for almost a year, and if you could read anything except your pay check you'd know it. His gang robbed the First Commercial yesterday and got out of the city in automobiles. They left the cars near Caliente and a hick constable came along in time to chase 'em into the mine tunnel. They've got the gunmen cornered, but the sheriff here doesn't want to risk his men by going in after 'em. You're going to deliver the tear bombs and a couple of deputy sheriffs that'll be here as soon as they get the bombs from the police department."

"And the Trans-Mountain Company's going to risk a whole airplane in all this dew that's falling?" marveled

Domino. "Nothing can surprise me now."

Further hostilities were halted by the arrival of two burly men who announced that they honored the County of Los Angeles by serving it as deputy sheriffs. A red-nosed, somewhat fat man stated that his name was Briggs and that people called his red-haired companion Lawrence, and that the pair of them would appreciate speed on the part of the pilot.

Domino whistled cheerfully and strolled toward the plane, the propeller of which was revolving slowly.

"Say," demanded Briggs, "are you the aviator?"

"Who? Me?" asked Domino innocently. "Oh, no. I'm just the chauffeur of this here plane, working for the safest transportation company in the world. You in a hurry?"

"Yes, we're in a hurry, stupid," rasped the larger man. "The way you go about it, you'd think them bandits were going to stay in that cave a week. Step on it."

"You're going to be surprised how fast you get there," promised Domino good-naturedly. "Hop in and we're off."

"By the way," snapped Campbell as Domino prepared to follow his passengers into the plane, "there's big money out for any member of that gang. If you should happen to find one running around loose, paste a rock at him and claim the reward."

DOMINO generously promised to capture the whole damned gang and climbed into the plane. As he did so he noticed the suitcase containing the tear bombs and wanted to know if perchance they might not go off unexpectedly.

"Not a chance," stated one of the passengers. "You going to ask questions or fly this plane?"

"Don't be in such a rush," stated Domino. "The Kern County gang'll get the reward anyway. All set?"

"Lord love a pink dickey bird," gloated Domino as with practiced hand he lifted the heavy plane off the field and sent it curving upward. "Look at those clouds over the Ridge! Those two tough deputy sheriffs are going to have one merry ride for their apples. Some excitement at last! Bet she's blowing seventy miles an hour. Hold everything!"

Fog was encountered at the foothills of the Ridge Route and Domino opened the slide panel at his side so that a little of the keen, cold air could get in.

"Real flying," he muttered, and eased back on the stick to gain altitude.

Then the plane thrust its nose full into a howling gale and Domino hastily closed the panel at his side. Regretfully he admitted that cabin ships were not so bad at that. He was thinking of how cold it would be in an open cockpit plane. Sudden, tricky gusts of wind seemed devilishly intent upon keeping the plane off balance. For a while Domino's arms ached from the steady side-to-side pull of keeping the wings on an even keel.

The two passengers huddled in their seats and conversed in low voices. Domino thought they should have been more sociable. They could have talked to him by standing in back of the control cockpit.

Finally the plane crossed the Ridge and was soon cruising over level land. Bakersfield stood out clearly in the distance and the storm was losing most of its strength. Domino banked and headed for the Tehachapi ridges, miles away. He throttled the motor and looked back.

"How're they coming?" he called.

"Aw right!" was the curt answer. "Step on it."

Seeing that friendly conversation wasn't forthcoming, Domino opened the throttle and sent the plane winging over the plain at a hundred miles an hour. Soon he was flying over low foothills again; and finally rough mountain crags were underneath.

After studying his maps Domino decided that Caliente was more to the west. He'd cruised in the new direction about a half hour when he noticed several cars parked on the road beneath him. These, he decided, must be the cars of the posse that had cornered the notorious Big Troth gang. After circling a few times to attract attention he swooped lower and studied the landscape for a possible landing field.

Across a low ridge he spied a level mountain meadow and sent the plane down, motor throttled to landing speed.

"Soon comes the excitement," he chuckled to himself. "If I had a horse I'd feel like a movie sheriff, only those babies don't get their bandits with tear bombs."

SELECTING a likely spot Domino eased forward on the stick in the proper manner to insure the customary three-point landing. Instead it was a four-point and then a seven-point landing, including the propeller and various parts of the fuselage.

Domino hadn't noticed a grass-hidden log that lay in his path, and before he could do anything about it, the wheels struck, the undercarriage was sheared off and the plane went into a ground loop. It ended with its nose in the ground and its tail thrusting sedately skyward.

After these several things had occurred Domino opened his eyes and was considerably surprised to find that he wasn't dead. Shortly thereafter he assured himself that he wasn't even seriously hurt. Now if the passengers had shared his luck, things wouldn't be so bad.

But Domino discovered that the two deputies had piled neatly against the pilot's cockpit, and neither one seemed disposed to answer Domino's anxious queries as to the state of their health.

Domino kicked a hole in the side door and dragged the two limp forms out onto the meadow. Briggs's left leg was twisted under him and the red of Lawrence's hair was becoming a decided crimson due to the effect of blood that flowed from a wound in the crown.

"There," said Domino, surveying the victims ruefully, "goes the record of the Trans-Mountain Air Express for safety. Up until two minutes ago they'd traveled one hundred thousand miles without hurting a passenger. Now the record stands at one hundred thousand one hundred fifty-one miles, two damaged passengers, and eight thousand dollars' worth of busted-up airplane."

Domino was beginning to feel almost as badly as he should about this matter when there was a clap of thunder followed by an unexpected, chilling downpour of rain. He buttoned his flying jacket closely about him, shivered, and bethought himself of the injured men.

"It'd be just my luck," he stated, "to have 'em catch pneumonia and die. I'd better get 'em to shelter."

Fortunately a small solidly-built log shack with a half open door stood near by. Into this Domino dragged the two men. He closed the heavy door and went outside in the rain for some more heavy thinking. He realized that he must contrive to get the injured men to

a doctor. This seemed a tough problem until he remembered the cars on the other side of the ridge. He started in that direction at a brisk pace, but after a few steps he paused.

"Damn near forgot the tear bombs," he told himself. "Might as well take 'em along to the posse." He retraced his steps and secured the heavy suitcase.

"Helluva way to catch bandits," he muttered as he plodded across the sodden meadows.

After a half hour of painful effort Domino scrambled across the crest of the ridge and slid down into a narrow ravine where the walking was easier. It was raining in a seriously determined manner and there was no sight of human beings thereabout. He hoped he wasn't getting lost. Fifteen minutes more of walking and Domino halted. To his right there was a narrow, dark tunnel extending into the side of the mountain.

"Now what?" he puzzled. "Wonder if this is where this Big Troth outfit is hibernating?"

Then he noticed that there was a similar tunnel on the other side of the ravine.

"Regular rabbit's warren," he stated, and his foot dislodged a small rock that clattered down the ravine accompanied by considerable noise.

JUST then he heard an unpleasant whistling sound and something plumped against a rock a few inches over Domino's head.

"Shooting at me, eh?" he muttered and crouched down behind some bowlders.

Came another whistling sound and another bullet flattened itself against the bowlders uncomfortably close to the person of Domino. The shot came from the tunnel on the left. Domino flattened himself against the bank and decided that Fate had gone out of her way to be nasty to him.

"If I move," he told himself, "they'll plug me. If I don't I'll freeze to death or drown, either one."

Then Domino's brain proved that it had been given him for another purpose besides keeping his head from collapsing. It reminded him of the tear bombs.

"I'll show 'em," he stated. "Show 'em about this business of shooting at people!"

He opened the suitcase, secured a bomb and arose, unmindful of another whistling shot. After careful aim he hurled the first bomb.

"Right over the plate," he gloated. "Strike one!"

Encouraged by this success, Domino quickly hurled another bomb. He got results. A great cloud of smoke and several gasping men poured forth from the mouth of the tunnel. The men rubbed their eyes and swore colorfully.

"Hands up," shouted Domino, "or I'll shoot."

The fact that Domino didn't have a gun has nothing to do with the case. The hands of the half-blinded men automatically and submissively reached skyward.

Then an uncomfortable thought entered Domino's head.

"Why," he said aloud, "would bandits wear gold stars?"

He decided that they wouldn't; which proved that something had gone wrong, inasmuch as the man in the forefront of the group wore just such an emblem of authority.

"Hold on," Domino shouted. "I beg pardon. I thought you were those Big Troth boys."

The man who wore the star rubbed

his streaming eyes energetically, and finally vision returned to him.

"We ain't," he stated with emphasis and several choice bits of cursing. "And who the hell are you?"

"Me?" asked Domino innocently. "I'm the pilot they sent from Los Angeles with the tear bombs. Are you the posse?"

In sizzling words the group at the tunnel's mouth informed him that they were the posse, and that no matter what other talents Domino had he had just proved himself to be creation's masterpiece in the way of damned idiots.

"Well," said Domino soothingly as he walked toward the group, "you shot at me, didn't you? Anyway, you know now that these bombs 'll work. That wasn't a bad demonstration at all. I suppose you think that I had nothing to do all day but lie on my belly and let you guys shoot at me?"

"That's all right," grudgingly conceded the leader. "It was a mistake all around. We ducked into that tunnel to get out of the rain and still be able to watch the tunnel on the other side. When we heard you out here we thought they were making a break for it. Guess they're all in there yet."

After the truce had been effected, the sheriff and his posse examined the tear bombs.

"We'll get 'em now," gloated the official. "Constable Martin saw 'em go in there, and we know they haven't come out. A couple whiffs of this stuff and they'll be glad to come up for air. I know!"

SEEKING shelter behind bowlders, the posse worked its way across the ravine and to the mouth of the other tunnel without having drawn fire from the enemy.

"Are you fellows coming out?" inquired the sheriff, standing so that a shot from within would have no possible chance of hitting him.

"No, we're not coming out," came the reply accompanied by a pistol shot, a volley of hard-thrown rocks, and a somewhat less dangerous volley of curses. "Come in and get us."

"All right," shouted the sheriff. "Take this!"

He tossed a tear bomb into the tunnel. There was a yell, and the bomb came bouncing out into the sunlight again. It hadn't gone off.

"Bet the rain's spoiled them," mourned the sheriff. "Now how'll we get 'em out?"

"If the object is to make 'em cry," suggested Domino cheerily, "let's form a quartet and sing mammy songs. I'm a good tenor."

The sheriff gave his opinion of this idea and its author in terse, profane sentences, and hurled another bomb. This time a billow of smoke appeared in the mouth of the tunnel.

"Sure they're good," cried Domino joyfully. "Here, let me help. I always did like to bowl."

He sent a bomb into the tunnel, and the smoke increased.

"Right down the alley!" he whooped, and hurled another.

By this time the rest of the posse had become interested in the game, and a dozen tear bombs added their smoke to that which poured from the dark cave.

"Hey, youse guys," howled a voice from within. "Cut it out. What the hell's the idea? We'll come out, damn it!"

The sheriff motioned his men back.

"Get your guns out," he warned, "and shoot at the first sign of resistance. Those babies are bad."

Cocking their rifles, pistols, shotguns and other lethal weapons, the posse crouched behind bowlders and waited.

Several men came staggering out of the tunnel, their hands over their eyes and their bodies racked with coughing.

"Drop your guns," commanded the sheriff.

A single nickel-plated revolver clattered to the rocks at the sheriff's feet.

"All of 'em," the officer commanded, "and no funny business."

"Hey," called a voice from out of the smoke, "what you t'ink we are—a arsenal? Dat's all the guns what we got."

A gust of rain-laden wind dispelled the smoke and the captives could be seen plainly. Obviously there were no more weapons among this red-eyed, be-whiskered and tattered group of men.

"Fine desperate gang of gunmen," snorted the sheriff. "One toy pistol and enough whiskers to stuff a mattress. Say, if I'd known what kind of eggs you were going to be I'd have sent the matron of the jail after you. So you're the gang that's been making fools of the Los Angeles cops? Why, you look like a bunch of bindlestiffs."

"Well," inquired the most decrepit member of the assortment, "what you expect we'd look like? Dukes, maybe? Say, what's all this shooting for, anyway? We'll go to woik. You don't have to use poison gas. It ain't legal."

"What you mean, you'll go to work?" snapped the sheriff.

"What's it sound like I mean?" inquired the tattered one. "Woik. Woik. Understand dat word, Mr. Cop? Lemme tell you, we'd never 'a' seen yer dirty ol' county if we'd 'a' known youse was putting all the bos to woik on your roads. It's a helluva note. Gee, you'd think we'd stole a locomotive the way you come after us."

A HORRIBLE suspicion began to form in the sheriff's mind.

"You mean to say you're just a bunch of tramps?" he inquired.

"Sure, cop, sure," stated the man addressed. "Course we are. Now come on an' take us to the coop. If youse guys want roads so damn bad, why, we'll help. We're big-hearted, and besides, we're hungry."

The sheriff sat down on a rock. His revolver clattered to the stones at his feet.

"Then why," he asked weakly, "did you hold out so long?"

"Why? Ain't it easier to sit in a cave than woik on roads?" inquired the tramp. "When that hick constable chased us, we run, of course. We got in the cave and thought maybe you'd get tired and beat it."

Domino held his hands to his sides and danced in joy.

"Oh, boy," he gasped. "I flew an airplane clear from Los Angeles to capture a herd of Willies! Man, that's richer than Rockefeller. Wait until the Trans-Mountain Air Express hears about this. Hey, sheriff, why don't you arrest these Willies for impersonating bandits?"

"You shut your damn trap," requested the sheriff bitterly. "Holmes, herd this bunch of goats into the cars and take 'em to Bakersfield."

As Holmes and two other deputies got the obedient tramps into line the sheriff applied himself to the business of rehearsing all the profanity he'd learned in a long and varied career.

"Oh, say," gasped Domino, trying to hold in his laughter, "I forgot something. When I cracked up, land-

ing back there, I damaged a couple of Los Angeles deputy sheriffs. I don't know how bad they're hurt, but I think a doctor 'd do 'em good. Better come and help me get 'em out."

"All right," said the sheriff. "Guess we'll have to. Oh, gosh, what a break for me! If those L. A. deputies are conscious, what a laugh they'll hand me! All this trouble to capture a handful of bums."

"That's all right," soothed Domino. "We all make mistakes. I did when I cracked up that plane. Now let's hurry. Maybe they're dying or something."

Grumblingly, the sheriff and three of his deputies followed Domino over the ridge and down into the meadow.

Domino tried the door of the shack and found it locked.

"That's a dynamite shack," stated the sheriff. "You notice it hasn't got windows? It's probably got a snap lock and it got caught when you closed the door. We'll have to break in."

Two of the deputies crashed a bowlder against the door, and after several blows it splintered inward.

"Hope they're not dead," Domino gasped as he stepped inside. "I might—"

He didn't finish the sentence. A swift-moving object hurtled forward and toppled Domino to the ground. The cause of the downfall was the passenger who had been introduced as Lawrence. That worthy, with a revolver in his hand and a wild look in his eye, seemed intent upon going somewhere.

THE sheriff was a man of impulse, and the first impulse of an officer of the law is to capture anything that carries a gun and runs. He seized the blinking, light-dazzled Lawrence by the shoulders and knocked the gun from his hand.

"What's the idea?" the sheriff inquired in a mildly surprised voice.

Lawrence panted and his eyes darted swiftly about him as if seeking an avenue of escape.

Then his hands fell to his sides and his head drooped.

"All right," he snarled. "You got me."

Domino arose and Lawrence turned toward him.

"You're a fine guy, you are," Lawrence said accusingly. "If you knew who we was, why didn't you do something before we left? What's the idea of carting us 'way up here and then trying to kill us?"

Domino stared in amazement. Had the crash unsettled the man's mind?

"That's a habit of mine," Domino said with a straight face. "Sure I knew who you two were, but I didn't know which was who. You're—"

"Spud Kelly," stated the man hitherto known as Lawrence. "I ain't Big Troth—that's the other guy. Guess the gang's squealed an' all that. I'll take the rap, but Big Troth done all the plannin', see?"

The sheriff didn't stop to figure things out. He was a man of action. Leaving the self-confessed Spud Kelly in the hands of his deputies, he entered the dynamite shack, to reappear dragging the still dazed fat man by the collar.

The sheriff examined his captive in amazement.

"I'll be damned," he said. "It *is* Big Troth!"

"Who'd you think it 'd be?" inquired Spud Kelly. "Aimee Semple MacPherson, maybe?"

A look of supreme happiness came into the sheriff's eyes.

Although Domino was by no means clear as to certain important matters in this swift and unexpected turn of events, he had followed things fairly closely.

"You didn't get 'em," the airman told the sheriff. "I did. I don't know what it's all about, but anyway I locked 'em up."

"Well," stated the sheriff quite logically. "Anyway, they're got."

"NOW I see it all," Domino told Mr. Campbell in the field office of the Trans-Mountain Air Express. "Those two guys must have been tipped off by some friend in the Los Angeles sheriff's office that the Kern County officials thought they had the bandits in a crack. Big Troth and his pal were afraid of a squeal if the gang was captured, so they took a desperate chance. They impersonated deputy sheriffs, got the tear bombs, and beat the L. A. deputies to the plane. Guess they figured they'd bean me and use the bombs of the officers. Man, that's a daring plan even if it didn't work. Say, is the office going to can me for busting up their plane?"

"No, they're not going to can you," stated Mr. Campbell. "Every one thinks you did it on purpose. Why, we got a lot of free advertising out of the deal. We're claiming that a Trans-Mountain plane can't be crashed unless a skilled pilot that knows his business does it purposely. Now beat it out to the field and start your run to Bakersfield. You've got seven school-teachers that 're going to attend some institute in the valley. Check the weather."

Domino arose slowly, and commented unhappily: "Damned if I'm not gonna quit this company. Seven school-teachers that 'll pester hell outta me. Check the weather, huh? Say, there isn't any more thrill in flying than there is in wheeling a go-cart."

THE END.

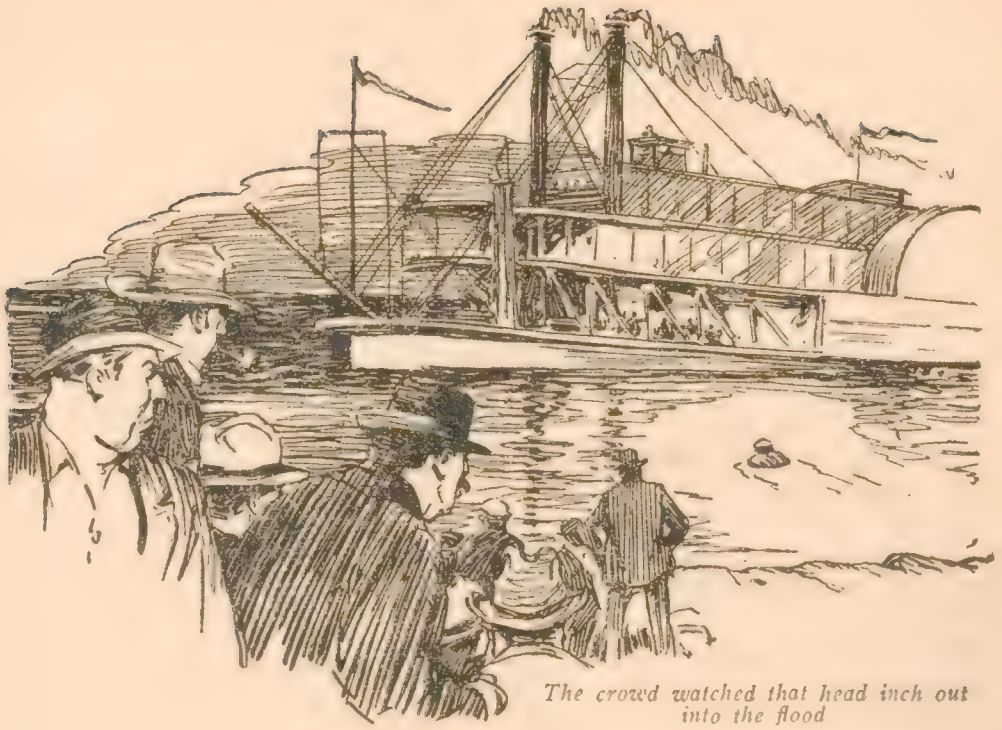
Pigeons Carry News in Japan

AT a Japanese baseball game, the press box is equipped neither with telephones nor wireless. The news reporters may be seen approaching the field carrying large baskets under their arms, or with a coolie carrying the basket.

The baskets contain carrier pigeons, and at the end of each inning the reporter scribbles the result on a thin scroll of paper, fastens it to a bird's leg and lets it free. The pigeon takes a turn about the diamond, as though getting its bearings, and then shoots through the air like an arrow toward the open window of its newspaper office, where the scroll is removed and the special editions started on the presses.

Not infrequently dirty work enters the game in order that one paper may have a scoop. The birds are shot down on their way to the news office and naturally the rival paper is the only one that has the last minute news.

Wyman Sidney Smith.



The crowd watched that head inch out into the flood

Backwater

Rising storms of jealousy and hatred threaten young Jim Murdock because of his law-breaking father—while the flooding Mississippi threatens to destroy all the Arkansas lowlands

By T. S. STRIBLING

Author of "East Is East," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JIM MURDOCK, returning to his father's plantation near the Mississippi at Ringerman, Arkansas, after graduating from an agricultural course at the university, finds things unchanged. His stubborn old father, Bill Jack Murdock, is still the distiller and bootlegger for the whole Ringerman country.

Jim pleads with him to give it up, for they have the plantation and more money than any one else in the county. But old Bill Jack voices his curious code—he claims he is doing the community a service by furnishing stuff that won't poison anybody; that it gives him great influence in the county, a voice in politics and public improvements. As a conscientious man, he has to do his duty, he says, rather than let unscrupulous moonshiners poison his friends who would drink anyway.

Jim has a steer, infected with the contagious Texas fever, which he intends to study in the hope of finding a serum to cure the disease; and he re-

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sists the efforts of the deputies, and of a malevolent white-trash neighbor, one Davis, to make him kill the steer, which he has safely isolated.

The adjoining plantation is owned by Winchell Meredith, cotton man and bank stockholder, whom old Bill Jack Murdock had worsted in a boundary dispute. Jim loves his daughter, Mary Sue; but she tells him that while she loves him, she cannot marry him—his father is outside the law, outside the pale of cultured society. Taking refuge from the storm in an abandoned Murdock barn, Jim and Mary Sue find Ed Purvis, absconding cashier of the Ringerman Bank; and Mary Sue tells him she must inform the authorities. Little Purvis goes out into the storm.

Jim realizes that Pontus Pilt, their mulatto, has been feeding Purvis, who had once befriended Bill Jack; but he cannot find his father to have the matter out with him. Jim's steer has died; but Davis claims Jim didn't burn the carcass, but scattered germs far and wide.

On his way to town, Jim passes Deputies Ladderbury and Himes with a bloodhound; the Merediths' house guest, Ned Nevis, had informed them of seeing a man answering Purvis's description coming out of the barn.

Jim gets his father to lend Winchell Meredith five thousand dollars—Meredith's loss through Purvis's peculations—in consideration of Meredith's keeping silent about Purvis's presence. Then Jim learns that Mary Sue hadn't told her father, and wasn't going to, and that Nevis had just told the sheriff about the man in the barn on a guess, as a collegiate prank.

Jim, going out that night to warn Purvis of the bloodhound on his trail, finds Meredith's negro, Poindexter, carrying Purvis along the levee, to a new hiding-place—carrying him, so there will be no scent trail! Jim surmises that it is just a negro's natural kindness for a fugitive.

Jim and his father have a terrible argument over Bill Jack's bootlegging, and the young man threatens to leave home and try dry farming in the West. But Mary Sue refuses to marry him. Meantime, it keeps storming; and the river rises, pushing the water higher in the backwater along the Murdock plantation.

CHAPTER XI.

FLOOD DAYS.

AS the red sunset had forecast, when Jim Murdock awakened the next morning he found it was raining. He lay in bed for a while listening to it with a feeling the hour was late, for all the dim gray light peering into his window.

Murdock himself felt gray. Even if his father had not been a bootlegger, his own standing would be just the same as far as Mary Sue Meredith was concerned. His father was not what any one could call an aristocrat; he had none of those social graces and actions; in fact, he despised the formal aristocratic attitude toward life.

Well, to come right down to it, Jim himself did not see how any one could be quite comfortable if he had to be so continually mindful of the minute details of "good manners." Manners, it seemed to Jim, were like suits of armor behind which one never saw the real person. Armor itself had been an aristocratic invention.

His thoughts deserted this unrewarding theme and came back to Mary Sue. His house seemed so still, empty. Well, he would go West. After last

night there was no real reason why he should remain here. He would repack his things.

The telephone rang.

The youth lay lazily quiet, hoping Aunt Hetty Ringerman would hear it from the kitchen, but when he listened he discovered she was beating biscuit dough, and so would not hear. It also showed Murdock that Aunt Hetty was making "beaten biscuit" for the twelve o'clock dinner. It was high time he was out of bed. So he got up and went to the telephone himself.

Mary Sue's voice, thinned and metallicized by the receiver, said in his ear: "Hello! That you, Jim?"

The gray day and his future life immediately brightened for Murdock. He twisted one drawered leg around the other, leaned against the telephone box and smiled.

"Yep, this is Jim. How're you getting on, Mary Sue?"

"Fine. Did you see the beautiful sunset yesterday?"

"Yes. I knew it was going to rain some more."

"More? You mean still. Papa telephoned from Ringerman that the water is halfway up on the levee. Wouldn't it be awful if it broke through?"

"It sure would. Say, you haven't changed your mind about anything, have you, Mary Sue?"

"About what?"

"Oh, you know!"

Mary Sue began laughing.

"Haven't the slightest notion what you're talking about."

Murdock felt a tantalizing tickling in his chest. He wanted to grab Mary Sue in his arms and shake her into seriousness, yet he found himself more or less grinning, too.

"Mary Sue, you know very well—"

"I called you up to remind you of that dance at Squire Mathis's."

"Mary Sue, I'll have to go by myself to get there."

"You won't have to dance by yourself. I have your second, third, fourth—I don't know how far."

"Does that still hold, after last night?"

"Of course it does — tighter than ever. You'd better come."

"Would you wear your Tux if you were me?"

"I haven't any Tux."

"No; but if you were me you would have."

"Yes, if I were you I'd have a lot of things—a house, and carriage and horses, and a nice little wife with brown eyes—"

"Mary Sue! For God's sake don't rub it in like that!"

"No, Jim," she said, quickly sobered. "Don't wear your Tux; some of the young folks around here who haven't any would say you're stuck up."

"Well, all right. Good-by—and thanks for calling me up. You'll do it again sometime, won't you?"

They talked for five or ten minutes longer about whether Mary Sue would ever call him up again. This was finally interrupted by the hasty information that Mary Sue's mother had come into the room, and that ended it.

IT had been a thrilling but an unsatisfying conversation to Murdock. It had not been long enough, nor had it been definite enough. He turned from the telephone with an itching desire to go over and see Mary Sue at once. He felt he had something to tell her.

Outside, the rain dripped and dripped.

He went back to his bedroom and dressed, on the alert, hoping that Mary Sue's mother would pass on through whatever room it was she had entered and that Mary Sue would call him up again. However, this failed to take place. When he got back down to the living room again his father was in.

Mr. Bill Jack Murdock was, as usual, wet, and for some reason the youth was sharply irritated at his father's condition.

"Dad," he said, using the college term instead of "pap," the country word; "what makes you want to run around among your stills yourself?"

"Why, to see 'em," answered the old man in jolly spirits.

"Why can't Pontus do it for you? Getting wet—wading mud at your age!"

"Stouter than you air, right now." The old man blinked his prominent eyes in gusto.

"That's not the point," declared Jim. "You ought to systematize your work. If you must make liquor, you ought to systematize it."

"'Y ganny I got a system; it's to make it an' sell it. What's wrong with that?"

This irritated the son. Apparently he was a joke. He could not persuade his father or Mary Sue or any one to talk seriously; and it was such a dismal morning, too.

"The trouble is you do your work yourself," pointed out the son. "Let other men do it for you! You shouldn't run around among your stills all sorts of weather. Why don't you lay private telephone lines to each one and just ask the men how things are getting on?"

The father pondered this a moment. "No, 'y gannies that would make the debbities mad, Jim."

"Make 'em mad? Why?"

"Well, for me to be so owdacious as to rig up wires runnin' in all directions leadin' to my stills—so if a debbity followed any wire at all he'd shore to land on a still. Well, the people would git to laughin' at the debbities, and they wouldn't like that."

Jim was disgusted. "Put 'em underground, of course."

"Well, 'y ganny," ejaculated the father in quite a different tone. "I never thought of that. D' reckon they'd work underground?"

"Sure. Insulate 'em."

"Huh. Well, underground telephones might come in handy, 'specially when a United States marshal comes around. 'Y ganny a college edjercation does pay after all, I reckon."

Jim Murdock now wanted to think of his girl again. He had finished with stills and telephones, but his father had not.

"In this instance, Jim, I couldn't use Pontus anyway. It had to have my personal attention."

"What did?" inquired the son, who had lost the thread completely.

"Why, my business, of course. I had to pick out fifteen or twenty gallons of A-1 stuff, and I can't trust Pontus to do that. All whisky's alike to Pontus—it's all good."

"What are you going to do with so much?" asked Jim in surprise.

"Why, there's a dance to-night," replied the distiller simply, "and besides, that ain't so much."

The youth stared at the short man in consternation. "Pap, you're not going to the dance at Squire Mathis's?"

"Shore," ejaculated the old man in reciprocal surprise. "You won't find no better trade nowhere, Jim, than at a dance."

"But, look here!" The son wet his

lips. "Why—er—pap, I'm going to that dance."

The father looked at his son dubiously. "You don't mean you want to peddle the stuff yourse'f, Jim? I don't want *you* to peddle—"

"Hell, no," blurted out the youth in repulsion.

"Then I don't see exactly?" Mr. Murdock studied his son with reddened questioning eyes.

"Why, Mary Sue!" blurted out the youth in embarrassment. "She'll be there."

RELIEF came over Mr. Murdock's face.

"Well, 'y ganny, do you know so little about the business as to imagine I'd go right up into the house itself? You don't think I sell my stuff open, do you? I should say not. I won't be in a quarter of a mile of that house. I'll be in the woods, out of sight—but not too fur out of sight." The old man wagged his head with a wink of good spirits.

The wink depressed the son acutely. The thought of his father in the woods a quarter of a mile from the house, while he was in the Mathis parlor dancing with Mary Sue, when he knew what the girl felt about aristocracy—

"Look here, pap," pleaded Jim in a sick tone; "why can't you send Pontus to that dance?"

"Why, Pontus hasn't got the jedgment and the personality to han'le a dance, Jim," responded the old man gravely.

"What do judgment and personality have to do with it?"

"Why, ever'thing. I'll keep them young bucks quiet and orderly, and won't let none of 'em git so full as to make a fool of hisse'f. But the boys wouldn't behave theirse'ves for Pontus. He couldn't make 'em stop drinkin' or shootin' or hollerin'. You know he couldn't. No, Jim, if some good influential man like me don't attend these country dances, they'll either be flat tires for the lack of a little liquor, or they'll be hell-fired blow-outs because they got too much. Some old head like mine owes it to the young folks of Ringerman County to see that their little jollifications are jolly, and don't land 'em in jail or the penitentiary."

"Any man," ejaculated Jim in disgust, "who would fight at a dance!"

"Oh, well, all the boys around here haven't been to college like you have, Jim. You've got to make allowances for people who can't afford a edjercation." And Mr. Murdock looked at his son with a natural pride that his foresight and business sagacity had given these advantages to Jim.

The rest of the afternoon the elder Murdock devoted, no doubt, to mobilizing his twenty gallons of first-class stuff, and Jim saw nothing more of him. Jim Murdock himself was torn between going and not going to the dance; between taking a chance that his father would meet Mary Sue, and that he would not.

Then he wondered about his Tux, and whether Mary Sue had meant what she said. Why couldn't Mary Sue be more serious? If Mary Sue meant to go on in such a frivolous way, he'd be damned if he knew whether he wanted to marry her or not. He didn't much believe he did. That was the sort of day it was for Jim!

In the afternoon he began to think of what he would actually wear, Tuxedoes barred through reasons of diplomacy. He began looking at his different ties and collars. It seemed to Mr. Murdock that he had a remarkably unsuitable collection of ties. They

were wrinkled; they didn't have the hang; they were, he fancied, out of date as to color and form. Every tie he drew out of his trunk was an insult to his former judgment in ties.

What he needed was a fresh tie. He decided he would spin up to Ringerman, look over the haberdasher's up there, and pick himself out a tie that would look right and hang right. And when he saw Mary Sue that evening they would have a serious talk. This light, frothy, giggly stuff didn't go with a man like him. So he got himself ready and started for Ringerman.

On his way to Ringerman Mr. Murdock changed his attitude toward Mary Sue a number of times. The thought of the girl enveloped him in a warm, tantalizing aura. There were moments when the young college man literally did not know where he was or where he was going. He would wake from an entranced pondering on Mary Sue, and only by looking over the speeding countryside could he determine his position.

SOMEWHERE on the trip Murdock came out of one of these semi-comas, to discover that his motor was traveling through water. Water had backed from somewhere to about six inches deep over the public road. The young man then had to decide where the roadbed lay by the location of the telephone poles. He accomplished this task with about half his mind, the other half continued with Miss Meredith.

At another time music brought him out of his abstraction. He found he was near the outskirts of Ringerman and the music was made by a gang of negroes who sang as they worked on the levee. This time the negroes really worked. A white overseer had been placed over them, and they were busily repairing a small break in the dyke. Murdock remembered the water he had crossed, and decided it must have come from this break. He drove on into town.

Just as the youth entered the courthouse square, the persistent drizzle of the morning increased to a violent downpour. He drew up close to the curb and made a dash into a haberdashery, but the mere crossing of the pavement drenched him.

The merchant, Cohen by name, stood looking out his door and ejaculated to Murdock in his metallic Semitic voice, "My Gott, vill it nefer stop?"

The youth turned and looked at the descending wall of water and said, "I want to look at some of your ties."

The storekeeper stared at the rain as if hypnotized.

"Ties," he repeated. "Yes, right around here," and he went behind his counter to show them. While he twisted one of the scarves around his finger to show how the knot would look, the rain stopped abruptly and its drumlike roll gave place to a wet, dripping silence.

"Gott, I hope diss iss de end of de rain," ejaculated the merchant, forgetting his ties. "I hope it iss."

He came around from behind the counter to walk out on the pavement and look up at the sky. Murdock followed him and saw sulphur-colored clouds swirling around a dim sun.

"Dose clouds," pointed the haberdasher, "dey're coming diss way."

"It 'll start again in three or four minutes," predicted Murdock.

"My Gott, I hope we don't get fed by airplanes again," mourned Cohen.

"Hardly come to that," said Murdock with American optimism. "Just the spring rains."

"Certainly has shot peesness to hell. I don't get my stuff off de boat right now."

"Why not?" Jim was surprised.

"De boat can't land. De guard won't let her touch de levee—it iss too soft."

"That so? I didn't know the river had reached that stage."

"Vy, de Saint Joe is due to-day, and she hass half a gross of new ties for me. Vat chance haff I got? None. Dey go down to New Orleans wit' her. Ven dey come back, dey're out of style."

"Were the ties you showed me in style?"

"Ze most exclusiff designs from St. Louis." The storekeeper spread a palm.

They took one last look at the sky, then went inside and Jim selected a tie.

When Murdock reëntered his car he glanced at his watch and saw he still had much of the afternoon unspent. He thought he would go to a drug store and telephone Mary Sue about the boat and the levee. He had somehow caught the town man's excitement about the matter.

JUST as he was about to step out of his car in front of a drug store he saw Winchell Meredith walking rapidly along the street toward the river; a little distance behind him came Poindexter. When the planter saw Jim he called him hurriedly.

"Murdock, would you mind running me and Poindexter down to the dock?"

"Certainly not. What's the matter?"

"Why, the Saint Joe's coming in—that is, maybe she'll come in—and I want to get a letter off on her."

"Mail a letter on the Saint Joe?"

"That's our only means now."

"What's the matter with the trains?"

"Cut off by backwater. The Cotton-belt came in yesterday afternoon eight hours late, and she went out like a hearse, over soft tracks. The station agent said he supposed it was her last trip. Lord, there it's started again! I've simply got to get this aboard the Saint Joe!"

He twiddled a long, official-looking envelope in his pocket. Mr. Meredith's face seemed drawn with the importance of this letter. He stared down the flooded streets toward the docks.

"Isn't it amazing," he ejaculated, "how cotton keeps going down in the face of these spring floods! Yet what has already happened has damaged cotton thousands of bales in our county alone. Cotton *should* be up!"

The thought that Mr. Meredith was an aristocrat lent a charm to his conversation.

"How do you explain it?" inquired the younger man simply.

"Wall Street bears. They think they can sell faster than nature itself can bull the market. Well, they're headed for disaster! Cotton's bound to go up. Don't you believe that, after this?"

"Yes," agreed Jim tamely, trying to sound as if he were interested in cotton and had given the matter thought, "it's bound to go up after these rains—late planting—a lot of the land won't be seeded at all—" He left his voice up in the air, trying to think of other reasons, but none occurred to him.

The levee along the Ringerman water front was holding. Two or three guards with rifles walked along the top in order to warn away any steamboat that might be inclined to land at the docks. The push of a hundred or so

tons against the softened levee would probably mash it in and flood the town.

There were some negroes, too, working on the levee top in a lackadaisical way, piling a crown of extra dirt on the bulwark. The white men looked with anxious eyes over the sudsy sea that swept past the town and speculated on the crest of the rise. There was a big radio in the county courthouse which had said the crest was at Joplin. The telegraph had given a slightly different version; it claimed a nine-foot bulge at Cape Girardeau; this would reach Ringerman in thirty-three hours. The white men were talking about it. Nine feet would flatten out to about a foot and a half at Ringerman. It would back up into the Ohio, the Red, the L'Anguille. No, it would not mean more than a foot and a half. If only the sun would shine out and the damn rain stop!

In Murdock's mind there gradually formed a conception of the enormous contour of the river. It was a series of prodigious hills of water—hundreds, thousands of miles long—rushing with prolonged crests toward its final haven of the sea.

It did not look like this. It looked level. It seemed to flow swiftly near the bank, but far out it barely crept. The youth asked one of the negroes how wide it was.

The black man scratched his head, pondering distances.

"Rivah an' backwater togedder, boss, I reckon 'bout twenty mile."

It might have been any distance. Murdock could not see the opposite bank. As he looked, the black men working on the levee interrupted their labor to chant out:

"Heah she comes! Saint Joe's a comin' down de ribber! Saint Joe's comin' roun' de ben'." Their words fell into natural rhythm; black poets through the grace of God.

HOW they spotted the distant packet so promptly Murdock did not see. A dot, a semicolon and a hyphen of smoke on the endless northward stretch of the river.

The steamer swiftly materialized, and presently a feather of steam spurted out from between her smokestacks. A minute later the distant organ tone of a Mississippi River packet floated to the watchers.

The negroes waved their caps and raised a responding chant, moved by the deep affinity between black men and steamboats. Two or three of the guards fired their rifles as a warning of extraordinary precautions and a signal that the boat was not to land.

The Saint Joe began backing against the current so she would be swept past the landing more slowly. The negroes on the levee recognized some of the roustabouts on the boat, and they began shouting at each other. Murdock could hear the tinkle of the pilot's bell in the engine room.

The captain appeared on the hurricane deck with a megaphone. "Ringerman ahoy!" he yodeled in syllables that somehow struck Jim's ears as big spherical bombs. "Can—the Saint Joe—land?"

One of the guards on the levee shouted back in a voice that was flat and lost in space, "Naw—kain't tie up, Cap'n—levee too soft."

"Got — freight — for Ringerman. Flour—bacon—beans." Then, after a little pause he added, with the everlasting Southern tendency to jest, "You—may—need it—to thicken—yo' soup!"

The guard on the levee was not to be outdone. "We done quit usin'—

flour an' beans, Cap. We gone to usin' mud!"

The negroes guffawed. Everybody laughed. The bell in the Saint Joe engine room tinkled to steam ahead.

Mr. Meredith had been listening from Jim's machine with a landsman's helplessness amid the large conversation of the river. Now he leaped from the motor, ran up on top of the levee and waved his letter.

"Ho, Cap'n," he shouted, "this letter has got to go! This letter has got to go!"

The captain was turning back to the steamer's Texas. Some of the roustabouts hallooed:

"Ho, Cap'n, dah's a passengah fur de Saint Joe!"

The commander on the hurricane deck looked landward again and elevated his megaphone. "What do you want—who is it?"

The planter shouted in a frantic voice, "Winchell Meredith! Got to get this letter off! Letter—"

He was waving it in desperation.

"Who is that?" boomed the megaphone.

"Winchell Meredith—Mer-e-dith!"

The Saint Joe was a hundred yards downstream. The captain had run back the length of the boat and was now megaphoning over her stern.

"Mr. Meredith—can you—get the letter—aboard?"

"Send it—by a nigger!"

"All right—send it on."

Came a pause. The steamer again reversed her engines and began backing against the current. She retraced her lost distance by inches.

Mr. Winchell Meredith rushed back to the motor.

"Poindexter! Poindexter!" he cried. "Come on, nigger, you got to swim with this letter!"

"My Gawd, Mist' Winchell, whut kin' of a letter is it you want me to swim wid?"

"Don't talk. Put the letter in your cap."

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, Mist' Winchell, you ain't gwi' make me—"

Jim Murdock suddenly came alive to his opportunity. "Poindexter," he cried, "I'm going to yell to the cap'n, if Cohen's got a box of ties aboard to send 'em by you."

Jim ran up on top of the levee.

"Cap'n," he hallooed to the slowly returning steamer, "look—among the freight—for a small package—to Cohen—Abe Cohen—small package of neckties."

This was hallooed over and over at varying tempos until the captain understood it. Then with the endless good will of a steamboat captain he called to his clerk on the lower deck, "Hennessey—run through the bills of lading. Small package for A. Cohen, Ringerman."

Poindexter was wading into the river. He had stripped down to a pair of very dirty drawers. His torso looked like an Apollo and the goose flesh on him gave his skin the finish of grain chocolate. Under his cap he stowed Mr. Winchell Meredith's letter.

The crowd watched the small black kinky head and the cap inch out toward the hissing vastness of the sidewheeler.

CHAPTER XII.

SQUIRE MATHIS'S DANCE.

ON his return from Ringerman to the Squire Mathis dance, Mr. Jim Murdock was delayed. His car stuck in the water a few miles outside of town and he had to hire mules

to pull him out. The negro mule driver, when he collected his dollar, in order to appear polite and not overly interested in his pay, glanced up at the rainy sky when Jim placed the bill in his hand and said he believed they were in for a wet spell.

Jim subscribed to this faith as automatically as the black had rendered it. He stepped on his starter and buzzed it for a half dozen turns before the engine caught. Then he went ahead as fast as the slippery road would allow.

He was in a hurry. He was afraid he would be too late for the second dance at Squire Mathis's. The light faded with the abruptness of a rainy day. The youth switched on his lamps and leaned over his steering wheel, peering into the indistinct blend of headlight and twilight.

He kept thinking of Mary Sue and Ned Nevis, and the fact that his own father would be at the dance. He felt nervous about it. It would be so easy for something to come up—something to disparage his father still more in the eyes of the girl.

Even while he was swishing danceward as fast as he could go he was half minded to turn around and go home. After all, if Mary Sue would not marry him, what was the sense in his "traipsing" after her all day long? And all night long, too, if his dreams counted anything. The Merediths really were aristocrats, and if Mary Sue would marry no one except a man of lineage—

He drew a long sigh and almost ran into two men who stood in the middle of the road signaling him to stop with shotguns.

There is something about a signal to stop with a shotgun which is decidedly arresting. The big car skidded again, of course, slicing the thin top mud of the road until it struck earth on the roadside, when the front wheel went in to its hub and the car stopped.

Murdock climbed out, instantly and intensely angry. "What in the damnation do you fools—" Then he recognized who it was and his anger gave place to blank amazement. "Ladderbury, what in the hell are you and Luke Himes stopping my car for?"

"Well—we didn't know it was yore car," said Ladderbury in casual tones.

"Yo' headlights blinded us," explained Luke.

"Well, why are you stopping any car at all?" inquired Murdock, and he thought of Purvis, and the possibility that Purvis might be trying to get away in a car.

"Searching cars to see if they're transporting liquor," said Ladderbury.

"You don't mean to say you're searching every car that passes to see if it has liquor in it?" exclaimed Murdock in astonishment.

"That's what we're doin'," stated Ladderbury stolidly.

"Why have you begun to-night—and why here?"

"Well, that dance up at Squire Mathis's will draw a lot of young bucks, and they're all comin' loaded, you know that. That's simply against the law, Jim. Me and Luke here are goin' to do our duty. When the law says the young bucks kain't take liquor to a dance, then they kain't, and that's all they are to it."

The motorist obviously didn't believe this. "Why this sudden eruption of civic virtue?" he inquired with a touch of irony.

"You nee'n' be usin' big words because you've gone to school," stated Ladderbury dryly. "Things have been running too loose in this county."

"And you're going to tighten 'em up?"

"Goin' to take a twist in 'em," nodded Luke solemnly.

"Well—luck to you. I hope you hold your jobs."

"Don't worry, we'll hold 'em."

"I hope you're not so busy enforcing the law you won't help me out of this mud, now that you skidded me into it."

The deputies had no objections to this. They got fence rails and pried the front wheel back on the road surface, and Murdock moved danceward once more.

HE was more belated than ever, and now his thought switched between two points: would he reach Squire Mathis's in time for the second dance, and why were the deputies searching cars for liquor? It was the most amazing enterprise he had ever known officers to undertake. How long, he wondered, did Tom Ladderbury and Luke Himes expect to hold their popularity if they stopped folks in their cars and looked for whisky? The more he thought about it, the more insane appeared their proceeding. He reverted to the theory that they were really looking for Purvis; then a downright shocking solution occurred to him.

He wondered if his daddy were back of this? Was it possible? He drove forward in a kind of stupor of surprise and distress. Could it be that his father had set the officers to stripping every guest of his liquor to insure a rushing business for himself at the dance?

He rejected this idea because his father was a man of honor. The son had never known him to do anything against his own conscience or against the tenets of his church as he understood them, and certainly Bill Jack Murdock would be churched instantly should his brothers in the faith discover that he was bereaving them of their whisky.

Well, then? Jim Murdock simply couldn't understand Ladderbury and Himes at all.

His thoughts presently were diverted from this conundrum by singing. He heard a man's voice lugubriously bewailing the fact that they had buried him on the lone prairie in a grave of insufficient width—six feet long and only three feet wide—over which the wild coyotes would in the future howl; all of which appeared to have been done without the singer's approval or consent.

This ditty apprised Mr. Murdock that he was drawing near the Mathis dance.

Other details developed. Cars, wagons and buggies stood along the roadside. The porch lights of the Mathis home came into view. These blinked a good deal because they were on a three-way circuit and they were continually being switched on by the chaperon inside the hall, and as quickly switched off by couples seated on the porch.

When young Murdock halted his motor in front of the house he heard the thumping, squeaking uproar of guitars and violins. It had all the go and swing of a dance that had been in progress for some time. Murdock had a feeling that his second dance was long since over with and gone.

On the Mathis porch were collected four or five of those mocking, unhappy youths who never dance themselves, but who attend every such festivity and watch the particular girl with whom they would love to dance, floating about in other men's arms all night

long. One of these lads, named Garrity, said to Murdock as he came on the porch:

"Hey oh, Jim, another fellow's dancin' with your gal."

Murdock said he would find another girl and pushed on through these dance bachelors into the parlor. The next moment he was inside amid a roomful of tangoers and black-bottomers. The couples circled around and around the room in clinched embrace.

In one corner sat four negro musicians pounding the air into a booming rhythm. They nodded, patted and swayed in a kind of frenzy to their own syncopation. They were the beating African heart of the dance. The white circlers merely reproduced their pulse in weaker modes.

Murdock was scarcely inside the door before he saw Ned Nevis and Mary Sue Meredith. They wove an intricate path among the crowded couples.

From the moment Jim Murdock glimpsed them he was unable to take his eyes off of them. All the other couples were mere shapes that either interfered with his view or were about to interfere with his view, or had interfered but were now happily out of the line of vision.

However, Mary Sue's dancing with Nevis made no difference to Murdock. He felt no resentment, no jealousy. He really did not. He was glad to see her have a pleasant evening. He hoped her pleasure was as brilliant as her eyes.

No, instead of resenting the fact, Murdock was pleased; though he did feel that as a dancing partner for Mary Sue, Ned Nevis was a misfit. He was a kind of fundamental maladjustment. She should have a more masculine partner because Mary Sue was such a feminine, such a very feminine girl. This was like two girls dancing together.

The sight produced a sense of strain in Murdock's temples and arms. He felt an impulse to brush away Ned Nevis and get Mary Sue a more suitable partner. Not that he was jealous. He did not feel an iota of jealousy toward Nevis, but he hated to have him spoil the evening for a girl like Mary Sue.

THE music broke off abruptly in the middle of a beat and left the dancers with a foot in the air. It produced a comic effect, a kind of physical humor, as if the negroes had given every one a sly dig in the ribs. There was an outbreak of laughter and a clapping of hands.

Jim Murdock at once moved across the floor toward Nevis and Mary Sue to claim his dances. He bumped into one or two couples whom he happened not to observe.

Ned Nevis did have on his Tux, perhaps against Mary Sue's directions. He was the only man on the floor wearing semi-formal clothes. It picked him out, and in very bad taste, too, Murdock thought—formal clothes at a neighborly dance like this!

Nevertheless Mr. Nevis was bowing from a certain coign of vantage and was saying in the meticulously affable voice of one rival to another: "We had about given you up, Jim," as though his evening would have been ruined if Mr. Murdock had not arrived.

"Yes," chimed in Mary Sue, extending an arm of a bareness and perfection that set up an odd feeling in Mr. Murdock's chest, "we had decided you weren't coming at all."

"I was delayed," explained Jim with

a grave face. "I got stuck in the water between here and Ringerman."

"Why, I didn't know there was any water between here and Ringerman," observed Nevis with the faint effect of an interlocutor at a minstrel show.

"Well, there is," stated Murdock flatly, looking at Nevis.

"Is it over the road?" inquired Nevis, earnestly attending to the necessity of uninterrupted talk.

"Of course it's over the road," frowned Murdock. "How could I have got stuck in it if it wasn't over the road?"

"You might have skidded," smiled Nevis, "or—you might have— Where was the water?" he veered, seeing a possibility of talk in this direction.

"About a couple of miles out of Ringerman," stated Murdock determinedly. "Look here, don't you believe I got stuck?"

"Why, certainly I believe it," snapped Nevis, his own fundamental dislike of Murdock getting the better of his manners. "What difference does it make what detained you?"

"No," chimed in Mary Sue with a smile, "it's like the weather: we can talk about it, but there's nothing we can do. I was really peeved. I kept looking for you," she smiled again.

The way she said, "I kept looking for you," disturbed Mr. Murdock; it sounded as if it were wholly in the past tense, that she had now ceased looking and expected him no longer.

"See here, Mary Sue," he ejaculated, "I get my dances, don't I?"

"Why, Jim," began Mary Sue in a hurried voice, "Ned here—"

At that instant the music swirled in again, exactly on the half beat where it had left off. Mary Sue extended an arm toward Murdock as she swung away from him:

"I've saved the 'Home, Sweet Home' dance for you, Jim."

Every couple had joggled into abrupt action. Murdock was left to maneuver his way back to the wall with the awkward feeling of a person walking alone among the evolutions of dancers.

Mr. Jim Murdock regained his place near the door shaken with a mixture of feelings—that Ned Nevis had doubted his word before Mary Sue, and that he had made a boor of himself. As he stood watching his sweetheart and his rival move among the crowd he breathed through open lips as if from some heavy exertion.

Apparently he was not going to get any dance until the last one. He was amazed at Mary Sue's ability to go on and have a pleasant evening with Ned Nevis. It seemed to Jim that the dance would be utterly flat to her.

In the midst of these acrid thoughts a rather tip-tilted voice said in his ear: "Thought you said—pick up another gal—dance with her."

Jim glanced around and saw who it was.

"Aw, Garrity," he said, disgusted, "you're drunk!"

"Why—why ain't you drunk?" nodded Garrity. "Only way to—to have fun—if they won't dance with ye. Have a drink."

Murdock pushed away the bottle the fellow was offering. "That's all right. Don't want any."

"HE ain't no friend of yours nohow," proceeded Garrity, replacing the bottle inside his coat with a secretive movement as if his whole performance had been hidden from the dancers. "No frien' of the Murdocks, Jim. I foun' that out myse'f."

"Who's no friend?"

"That—that doodle-doodle over there dancin' with yo' gal. Looks like a gambler to me—dressed up like a gambler on a Miss'sippy River steamboat. Take a look fuh yo'se'f—ain't he dressed up like a gambler?"

Murdock had an impulse to get rid of Garrity, but some weakness caused him to ask: "Why isn't he a friend of ours?"

"Why—cause he's against liquor. Makes it hard to git an' keep. See this bottle?" He showed it again at the edge of his coat. "I had to talk like a son of a sea cook for this bottle 'count o' that damned Miss'sippy River gambler."

"How did he do that?" inquired Murdock.

"Spreadin' dirty lies on yore pap, that's how. Says yore pap is harborin' thieves. I say b'gosh, ol' man Murdock's a honest ol' man—got a right to harbor thieves if he wants to. Ain't I right, eh, Jim? Come clean now." Mr. Garrity broke into a loose triumphant laugh. "I say a honest ol' man like yore pap's got a right to do what he pleases—harbor thieves, make liquor, do what he damn pleases because he's a honest ol' man."

All of this was in a loud argumentative voice; and by this time Jim was getting Mr. Garrity out of the parlor onto the porch where the drunken man's praise of his father would not be so embarrassing. Murdock hoped in a kind of cold sweat that the uproar of the jazz had drowned Mr. Garrity's remarks. Suppose Mary Sue had heard them!

Mr. Garrity objected ineffectively to his quiet but inevitable retirement from the parlor to the dark piazza.

"Jim," he said, reasoning as best he could with the irrational procedure of a sober man, "wha's use comin' out here? They're not dancin' out here—they ain't no music out here, Jim—cold—rainy. Jim, half the enjoyment of goin' to a dance is—is—bein' where the dancin's goin' on."

In the midst of his enunciation of these undeniable truths, Mr. Garrity suddenly went to sleep.

Jim Murdock stood on the dark damp piazza passively supporting his companion. The music came through the walls and windows with a blanketed effect. Murdock listened to it with a feeling that it was a great distance from him; and he doubted if he would ever get any closer.

He would never step over the indefinable boundary in Ringerman between the best families and the ordinary people. He might just as well let Garrity blubber forth his drunken truths. The people in the parlor, the people all over the county knew it anyway.

An impulse came to Jim to give it all up, get in his car, go home, pack his things and take the first train out—as soon as trains began running again. He had Mary Sue's "Home, Sweet Home" dance, but what was the use? He would go on home, pack up. In the midst of his planning the music snapped off again. There was a handclapping and a general movement in the parlor. Windows opened and couples came out on the porch in moving silhouettes. They sought settees, porch swings and double chairs in the befriending darkness.

Murdock waited a moment for this little exodus to settle down. In the general stir he heard apologetic murmurs, "Excuse us—we didn't see you," as some pair groped to a seat already occupied.

Presently the piazza became still except for an occasional scuffle or tearing of cloth or a smack as some girl mutely

resisted one of the major unconventionalities. Murdock began silently disengaging himself from Garrity. He did not want to let him fall. He shook him gently, "Garrity—Garrity, wake up!"

He thought of easing Garrity to the floor, but it was wet. So he kept an arm about the fellow and moved slowly down the porch with an idea of stretching him out on a settee and letting him sleep off his whisky in peace.

He had groped perhaps halfway down the piazza and had fumbled over one or two seats which were occupied when suddenly the lights flashed on. There came an outbreak of giggles and lively separations from everywhere.

JIM MURDOCK dropped Garrity in astonishment and anger. Close to him, almost beside him, Mary Sue Meredith was struggling angrily, trying to bend one of Nevis's fingers to break his hold on her. A kind of hot flame flashed over Murdock.

Garrity began struggling to get up after his bump on the wet floor. "I say ol' man Murdock's got a right—"

Murdock strode across and caught the smaller man by the shoulder.

"Let her loose," he ordered in a shaking monotone.

Nevis jerked to his feet. "What in the hell do you mean?" Suddenly he whipped across a blow.

Murdock felt a flash of heat and pain amid a dance of light. The next moment he seized Nevis in his dress collar, twisted the black tie with his left hand and pounded the fellow's smooth powdered face with his right. Nevis went backward onto the swing again. Murdock heard sounding blows on his own head. He knew there was confusion all around him, shouts, screams. Murdock drove ahead, pounding, beating, smashing with a hot satisfaction at the bruises and red stains that suddenly appeared on the smooth face.

Then arms grabbed him from behind and the gigantic force of a half dozen men broke his grip on Nevis. The black tie came away with his fingers.

Nevis was trembling out an angry "Damn him—he didn't fight fair—choking me!"

Mary Sue's angry voice was vibrating, "You started this, Ned Nevis—struck him in the face."

"Why, I didn't do it," croaked Nevis through his strangled throat, "he caught my shoulder!"

"Yes, but what made him catch your shoulder?" demanded Mary Sue, still angry on her own account.

"Now, boys, boys," came the composed voice of old Squire Mathis, "none o' this—no fightin' about a girl. If you wasn't in my own home I'd have to arrest you, boys, but I reckon my guests have got a right to fight if they feel like it."

Both combatants were now being held by half a dozen young men. Under their feet Garrity stared vaguely up at the crowd,

"What's matter, Jim? Damn Miss'ippy River gambler cheat you at poker?"

The lights of the piazza beat in quick pulses to the rhythm of Jim Murdock's blood. He trembled all over as the peacemakers kept up a pacifying chorus.

"Now, boys, cut that out or you'll break up the dance."

"Bring Mary Sue on back in the parlor, Ned, and we'll start up a fox trot."

"I'm going home," said Mary Sue with a white face. "I'm going home. To be fought over—like a—"

Half a dozen girls appeared. "Oh, Mary Sue, don't go home—you could not he'p it—how could you he'p it?"

"I'm ready to go," said Nevis.

Mr. Jim Murdock stood looking automatically all around him for his hat. He had a sense of final and complete loss. This would furnish Ringerman with endless talk. Fighting at a dance! Came home from college and had a fight at his first dance!

Nevis was fumbling at the wreck of his collar and tie.

"I'm ready to go," he repeated gloomily to Mary Sue. "Jump on a man when he's with a girl—"

"Ned Nevis, I say you started that fight," insisted Mary Sue bitterly.

"I tell you he grabbed me by the shoulder."

"Yes, but what were you doing?"

"Why I—I was just sitting here."

"Yes, you were just sitting here," repeated the girl with irony, moving toward Jim.

There was a pause and Squire Mathis said in his pacifying voice, "Now, Mary Sue, a young man ain't entirely responsible for what he does when he's got a little liquor on his inside and a mighty purty gal on his outside."

EVEN in his confusion Murdock began to sense that the onus of the affair was beginning to shift to Ned Nevis's shoulders. It was an inarticulate shift. Everyone was talking in the slow, soft, and rather cooing tones with which groups attempt to placate their members. But back of it all, they were eying Ned Nevis askance.

"Mr. Mathis," said Ned, making a sort of bow and holding his collar, "I apologize for my part in this. I—I never dreamed—I'm awfully sorry. And, Mrs. Mathis, I apologize to you. I'm sorry it happened. Come on, Mary Sue, let's go home."

"I'm not going home with you," stated Mary Sue flatly, "I'm going home with Jim. You started this."

"Mary Sue!" cried Nevis, "Anyway, I brought you here."

Mary Sue went over to Jim in silence. "I'm ready to go if you are, Jim," she said.

The guests were mutely glad. They had, after all, resented the Tuxedo—and on a stranger, too. If it had been a home boy, and he had worn his semi-formal a little jocosely, it would have been all right; but for a stranger to come in deadly seriousness—in a dress suit!

Murdock took Mary Sue's arm. He perceived that she had twisted the incident into something knightly on his part. Jim attempted to emulate Nevis's *savoir faire*.

"I didn't mean to raise all this trouble, Squire Mathis. I apologize to you and your wife, but as for the rest—I'll let it stand as it is."

He went into the hall to get Mary Sue's wraps. When he stepped back out on the porch he saw the single headlight of an old decrepit motor coming down the road. Its one ray swept the porch, and picked out a long cone of falling raindrops.

The car rattled up to the gate and stopped. A voice hailed, "Is Squar' Mathis at home?"

The Squire called back, "Yes, git out and come in."

"Why, no, Squar'," hesitated the voice. "Air you too busy to tend to a little business tonight, Squar'?"

"What kind o' business?"

"We got a little case, here, Squar'. Man's been caught sellin' liquor."

"Why, who are you fellows?" ejaculated the squire in astonishment, star-

ing out of the brightly lighted piazza into darkness.

At that moment three forms appeared in the edge of the zone of light. Murdock made out Tom Ladderbury and Luke Himes, and in between them came a short, stout, heavy-set man walking bolt upright and swinging a little from side to side with each stout step.

Old Squire Mathis was still more amazed. "Why, looky here, Bill Jack, them boys ain't got you?"

"Foolishness, Squar', jest plain addled-headed foolishness," growled back the short man in a disgusted tone, "when these spin'lin' debbities git a case again' me that sticks, 'y gannies the Miss'ippy river 'll pile up in the middle and run back Nawth."

"Whisky's one thing," snarled Ladderbury, "but keepin' me and Luke here out of a thousan' dollars' reward for Ed Purvis..."

"Oh, these boys air crazy," grumbled the bootlegger. "They're fools fer the lack o' sense. Keepin' them out of a reward—"

"Well, come on in out of the rain," invited the squire.

Mary Sue was standing beside Ned Nevis. Her eyes looked like black holes in her white face.

"Come on, Ned, let's go," she said.

Nevis came across to the bootlegger's son.

"If I may have her cloak, Mr. Murdock?" he requested.

CHAPTER XIII.

GATHERING STORM.

IN his room at home Mr. James Murdock repacked his belongings into trunks and boxes. The events of the previous evening had set him finally to the actual tasks of departure. The scene had demonstrated to Murdock that he might as well go.

There really was no point to his staying on in the Ringerman neighborhood. There was no point to his accepting the courteous evasions, the mute ostracisms which the established families would mete out to him and to his father's questionable prosperity. There would be, of course, other families, on the fringe of the accepted, to whom he would be very welcome indeed, but not the careful old families, the Merediths, the Mathises, the La Vernes...

With the thought of families, a queer, unhappy impression of the previous evening recurred to Murdock. At the moment when his short bold old father had entered the radiance of the Mathis porch between two officers, the son had the painful and fantastic impression that the whole Murdock family were walking in under arrest, the whole family and among them himself, young Jim Murdock.

Queerer still, it had seemed that the young Jim Murdock who came marching in with a deputy at each elbow could look and see the actual young Jim standing on the porch, glancing in pain and confusion from his father to Mary Sue; and that the Jim in the yard had felt a sort of contempt for the Jim on the porch.

Murdock shook his head and broke away from the mental wound he had received, to attend to the mechanical problem of packing. He pondered where he would best pack his books: should he put them all in one box or should he distribute them among the several boxes and trunks? And how should he protect his microscope on such a trip?

Then, too, he wanted to pack an ancient colored print of "Custer's Last

Stand" which hung on the wall of his bedroom. He wondered how he could keep the glass from breaking. He laid out a quilt on his bed and pondered whether he would better double it first and roll the picture in it, or wrap it so and turn the ends over the glass in a thick bundle.

The lithograph had been in his home ever since he could remember. He hardly knew why he wanted to take to New Mexico with him this Battle of the Little Bighorn. The original redness and goriness and toppling Indians in the picture had long since merged themselves in the quaintness and naïveté of an obsolete technique in lithography. For this delicate transposition of new art values for old, however, the youth who wrapped the picture had no feeling.

To Murdock, the scene with Custer standing alone beside his dead horse facing a hillside full of charging Indians always somehow suggested his father. There was something untamable, indomitable in the figure of Custer which old man Bill Jack Murdock —but the very suggestion itself was so subtle that young Jim did not know why he wanted the picture. He simply wanted to take it with him to New Mexico, and the only question was: should he double the quilt or spread it out full width and turn over the ends?

BLURRY negro voices outside his window interrupted Murdock's unhappy flow of thought. Pontus Pilt was telling his mother something and old Aunt Hetty had cut into the narrative contemptuously.

" All dat won't make no diff'unce at all to Mist' Bill Jack Mu'dock."

" No, co'se not," agreed her yellow son; " but if an' so—"

" 'Sides, who evah heard tell o' debbities raisin' a hullabaloo wid a man what can buy up a fiel' full ob 'em an' have enough money lef' ovah to hire a niggah to plow 'em undah?"

" Dat's why I's 'visin' you to move along," explained Pontus in a troubled voice. " It ain't de debbities."

" Well, if it ain't de debbities, who is it then?"

" Why, it—it's jest gin'l talk," hesitated Pontus.

" Huh!" The fat old woman looked up at the gray sky. " Moughty late in de day to be raisin' gin'l talk ag'in' Mist' Bill Jack Mu'dock. He's been makin' liquor goin' on'st six year, now."

Pontus mumbled something, in which Jim caught the name " Purvis."

" What about he?" asked Aunt Hetty.

" Folks 'low they ain't gwi' *lose* they money by a man what *makes* they whisky, too."

The manner in which Pontus stressed these two verbs seemed to hold a subtle defamation of her master for the old black woman. She dropped her deep tones of contempt for an upper register of anger.

" Looky heah, niggah, if dese po' white trash come foolin' roun' Mist' Bill Jack Mu'dock—"

" Well, I ain't sayin' dat muhse'f. Nee'n' be pickin' my bones."

" Dat pusson ain't bawn who can chase Mistuh Bill Jack Mu'dock nowheres."

" Well, I ain't sayin' dey kin, muhse'f. But dat's what a whole crowd of white folks is a sayin' up aroun' Mistuh McAdams's sto'."

" I say dat pusson ain't bawn—"

" Dey say if de debbities kain't clean out sich a den of iniquity, dey guess de people kin do hit fuh deyse'ves."

" An' I say dat pusson ain't bawn

who kin chase Mistuh Bill Jack Mu'dock nowheres."

"Whethuh they is or whethuh they isn't is one thing, and whethuh you stay aroun' heah cooking all day is anothuh. Why'nt you cook an' go, mammy. Aftuh all, you don' b'long to nobody."

The old woman straightened her bulk. "That shows what a fool niggah you is, Pontus. Cook an' go. Don't you know befo' a woman finishes one meal she sta'ts two mo'?"

To the last of this conversation Jim Murdock was listening curiously. He lifted the window and looked out on the pale soaked world after a long rain.

"What were you saying about Aunt Hetty going and some one chasing pap?" he inquired.

The yellow man looked up in surprise. Aunt Hetty mumbled: "Now you put yo foot in it!"

"Why, Mist' Jim, I didn't know you was heah," ejaculated Pontus.

"What were you advising Aunt Hetty to do?" queried the white man.

"Lawzee," grunted the old woman. "Pontus jess well 'vise me to flop my arms and fly away to hebben."

"What does Pontus think is going to happen?" persisted Jim.

"Aw, jess his foolishness, Mist' Jim. Mist' Jim, is dey anything I kin do fo yore packin'? You sho is makin' a shawt stay. When yo' foot steps in de front do, yo' shadduh falls out de back."

Then, with a remark about the weather, the old negro woman moved slowly to the kitchen about her endless chores. Pontus Pilt sauntered slowly off toward the stable on some or no errand.

The white youth remained in his window looking out at the soaked landscape, thinking uneasily about what he had heard from his servants. The talk reported at McAdams's store was probably the moral violence of envious poor whites to whom fortune had vouchsafed nothing more negotiable than their own honesty; it was the anger of the righteous poor for the prosperous evil-doer.

YOUNG Murdock's thoughts grew less defined and drifted into a reverie as gray and chill as the spring landscape about him. The soaked black trunk of the pear tree reminded him somehow of Poindexter swimming out to the side-wheeler with Mr. Meredith's letter. Then he thought of the great river rimming its levees for thousands of miles, a vast fragile aqueduct holding a rushing sea above the level of the land.

As his thoughts moved on and on he felt a pang that Mary Sue was not with him. If she were with him he would set against the treacherous water-soaked world the sweetness and constancy of their love.

The tinkle of the telephone jerked young Murdock away from the window. He took three strides across the room to the receiver and put it to his ear, expecting the cadence of Mary Sue's soft flat voice.

"Jim Murdock speaking," he said into the transmitter; "is that—"

"It's Ladderbury," drawled a man's voice.

Jim stood for two or three seconds. "Well," he questioned at length, coldly, "what can I do for you?"

"Is your pap there?" asked Ladderbury with the haste and hushed tones of secrecy.

"No, he's not here."

"Well—good-by, then."

Ladderbury was about to hang up

when Jim interrupted with more interest:

"Don't you want to leave word for him?"

The deputy was silent for such a space that Murdock thought he was gone.

"Hello, hello!" Jim repeated. "Don't you want to leave word for him?"

"I was jest thinkin'. Lemme see. Tell yo' pap that—" Came another pause, and then this carefully selected phrase: "Tell him he may have some visitors, who may inquire about Purvis. Me an' Luke won't be able to come. We wouldn't have thought twicet about nothin' if it hadn't been for that chap Nevis spreadin' reports about Purvis. If yore pap ain't at home, of course that would be unfortunate for the visitors. You un'erstan' that, Jim?"

"I think I understand what you're talking about."

"Well, jest tell yo' pap what I said. Good-by."

The receiver at the other end clicked up.

Instantly Murdock's mind was assailed by violent queries which Ladderbury could have answered but did not. He wondered who were coming, when they were coming, what they meant to do? He seized the bell handle and turned it violently. He listened, then rang again. He was on a county party line whose calls are intricate dash-dot signals. He got two or three farmhouses. He asked an unknown woman where was Tom Ladderbury.

"Which Ladderbury is Tom Ladderbury?" asked the woman. "The debbity or the hoss trader?"

"I want the deputy."

"Who air you?"

"This is Jim Murdock speaking."

Came an astonished pause, then the woman said to some one in the room with her:

"It's Bill Jack Murdock's boy wanting Debbity Tom Ladderbury. Don't that beat a hoss a flyin'?"

And the faint voice of the person addressed cackled dryly: "Well, that's one man who's a goin' to git what he wants."

THAT noon Mr. Bill Jack Murdock came home for lunch. He rode to the gate, flung his reins over a post and swung off his horse with the agility of a well-preserved old man. He entered the house swaying from side to side with the residual gusto left over from his victory of the previous evening. Pontus Pilt was with him and was ivory-toothed with grins.

"Bless me, but them little jestices of de peace kain't hol' Mist' Bill Jack no longer than a rabbit kin hol' a bulldawg. They didn't have no sea'ch warrant! Stan'in' there with de whisky jugs right befo' dey eyes, but de jedge couldn't see hit, 'cause they didn't have no sea'ch warrant."

"Glues dey eyes, not to have no sea'ch warrant," opined Aunt Hetty in her contemptuous barytone.

"De law is now fixed so's nobody kin make whisky," said Pontus Pilt, "but it is also fixed so nobody kin tech a man who does make whisky."

Old man Bill Jack Murdock moved about the kitchen with a faint grin on his face, blinking his eyes, enjoying these slanting compliments of his servants. The son followed his gray-haired father uneasily until he was out of hearing of the two negroes.

"Say, Pap, Tom Ladderbury called up just before you came in."

The short old man turned his body to look at his son. "What did that

spin'l-legged debbity want to say to me?"

"He said we were going to have some visitors."

"Well, I hope you told him we'd be at home. I'm always at home to visitors, Jim."

Bill Jack Murdock's son thought of the picture he had rolled up in the quilt, then he went on to tell the rest of Ladderbury's message.

"He said that Ned Nevis had told him the Purvis matter was a joke and that it was all right."

"'Y gannies, what did you say to that?"

"Why—nothing."

"You should have. You should have told him, 'y gannies, that he was wrong again, that Ed Purvis was right here and here he was going to stay till he has a chance to settle up legal."

"To settle!" ejaculated the young man in surprise.

"Yes, legal. The law's kinder like a fence, Jim; you can step over it to take a short cut somewheres, then when you git there you can step back in again. And a man's honest all the way through—if he knows where he's headed."

"But, Pap, that isn't right!"

"It's right, but it ain't legal," discriminated the old man. "If Ed Purvis comes through the deal with money to pay ever'body and some for hisse'f, what's the harm? Ever'body is better off than they was, so is Ed, an' we've got more money circulatin' in our county. 'Y gannies I consider it somebody's duty to hide Ed out tull he can settle. That's what Christianity tells me to do, also gratitude for past favors."

"Ed's not in our barn any more," observed Jim after a pause.

"No, I understan' the little spindlin' feller had to take to the swamp, my boy."

"He's not there either. I saw Poindexter pack him out on his back."

"Poindexter! Well I be jim-switched. What do you make o' that?"

"I don't make anything of it except a nigger'll do anything for a white man."

"Well, I don't know. Poindexter's Meredith's nigger. Looks to me like they must be something back of it." The old distiller sat pondering what could possibly be back of Poindexter's action, but apparently made nothing of it.

AS a matter of fact all this talk of Poindexter was a mere stop-gap placed before what Jim Murdock really wanted to say to his father. Now he began, as casually as possible.

"Pap, I packed my things this morning, ready to set out to New Mexico."

The old man looked around and said in a different tone: "Packed yore things!"

"Yeh. Ever'thing's ready to haul to the station when the trains start running again."

The old distiller opened and closed his mouth. "So you call this gone?"

"Yes, I guess this is gone," said the son in a minor key. "I'll be visiting back home now and then."

"Hm—Jim, it ain't on account of what I said to you the other night? You ain't leavin' on that account, are you, Jim?"

"No," hastened the young man, "not that at all."

"Because I didn't mean that, Jim. I say things I don't mean sometimes. Yore maw always un'erstood me, Jim."

"Well, it isn't for that at all. I really never thought of it again."

The old man looked around at the table, its red cloth, its yellow crockery. It was set out with Arkansas luxuries —fried chicken, jams, cakes, early turnip salad, pork and ham and sorghum. Somehow the rustic delicacies bespoke the loneliness of the house with just two negro servants and the old man in it.

"I was kinder expectin' it," said the father. "I seen you wasn't satisfied."

Aunt Hetty was disturbed. She turned from where she was snatching hot biscuits from the oven.

"Better set down an' make out yo' meal, Mist' Bill Jack," she advised.

"No, I'm not hungry, Hetty," said the old man in a monotone. "I know your biscuits are mighty light and the chicken's mighty good, but I jest ain't hungry. I ain't got no appetite."

He turned and started for the door toward his horse.

It shocked Jim that his father actually was going away without eating his dinner. The son followed the older man, conscience-struck. As a shift of theme, Jim Murdock reverted to the topic of Ladderbury. He was uneasy at the deputy's message, although the old man had dismissed it so lightly. When he reached the gate he involuntarily glanced down the water-soaked road to see if any one were coming from the direction of McAdams's store.

Old man Murdock let his eyes follow Jim's down the road.

"What do they propose to do if they do come, Jim?" he inquired dryly.

"I don't know, exactly. Pontus heard the men down there saying they were going to do something if the officers didn't."

"Well, 'y ganny, if the people aroun' here want to throw away the law, then I'll throw it away too. That's a game two can play at, Jim."

"Look here," suggested the son nervously, "when they do come why can't you be away at one of your stills, Pap? No reason in the world why you should be here. Lay low till this thing blows over."

"Now, 'y gannies, I ain't the sort that lays low, Jim. If my neighbors want to find me, they know where I'm at."

With this he mounted his horse, kicked the animal's flank and moved off in a brisk trot up the road.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Applicant 27

Strange was the advertisement that led James Cartwright Nichols to face an even stranger test

By HAROLD de POLO

"YOU came in answer to my advertisement?" asked the bronzed and bearded man, who had signed himself "Mr. X."

"I did," said the younger man. His cool gray eyes had a glint of recklessness in them.

"You are the twenty-seventh applicant," said Mr. X with a little sigh of fatigue. "Mr. Littell will explain the proposition to you," he added, with a wave of his hand toward a somber, grave-faced old gentleman, who had a distinct legal appearance.

"I don't think that's necessary," suggested the latest applicant with an infectious smile. "You both are probably bored after making the twenty-six previous explanations, and I believe I already am acquainted with the situation. I didn't personally see your advertisement, but got the news from one of the rather startled applicants who rejected your offer. He wasn't quite calm yet."

"Well?" put in the bronzed man, a furrow coming to his brow.

"I am willing to take you up," was the firm retort. "You say you are in search of a young man of agreeable address, preferably under thirty; of fair education and excellent physical health. I am twenty-eight. I have always been considered socially presentable—am a graduate of Yale. I am certain that my condition is good enough to let me step back onto the football field to-morrow. My name, by the way, is James Cartwright Nichols, and I am employed by the Amalgamated International Bank in the capacity of assistant cashier. Before his death, my father was the vice-president of this institution."

"Your appearance and record are satisfactory," nodded Mr. X.

"Thanks. Your advertisement, I believe, said that you wanted a man willing to engage in some hazardous adventure, the salary to be ten thousand dollars a year. In order to prove himself fit for this occupation, you had planned a certain test with which he must first go through. This test—my disturbed friend, who refused it, described it rather vividly—is as follows: You are to take a revolver with six chambers. You are to take six cartridges, three real and three blank, and insert them in alternate chambers. You are to close the revolver, whirl the chambers around so that the exact disposition of the cartridges will not be known to any one, and hand the weapon to the applicant. If he has the nerve to put it to his head and pull the trigger—and survives—the position is his. Am I correct so far?"

"You are!"

"Splendid. Furthermore — and quite as important. Provided you accept the applicant for this test, you have offered to have your legal representative, Mr. Littell, draw up a document whereby the applicant, in case he dies in this test, is to have his stipulated

heir or heirs reimbursed by you to the extent of exactly one hundred thousand dollars. In order to prove your own good faith, this document is to be delivered to the applicant, signed and witnessed, and he is to be allowed to mail it to his own legal representative before he attempts the test. Is that part correct, sir?"

"Perfectly. The document awaits only the insertion of your name, Mr. Nichols."

"You accept me?"

"I do!"

"Let's go, then," grinned the cool young man with the glint of recklessness in his eyes.

FIVE minutes later, after the document had been dropped in the mail chute outside Mr. Littell's office, James Cartwright Nichols took the loaded revolver that Mr. X handed him.

He looked about the room, in which the air had suddenly become tense, his eyes straying to the window that looked out on the panorama of New York's sky-scrapers.

"I'd like one last look at old Wall Street," he said casually, turning his back and sauntering slowly over toward the window.

Reaching the window, he appeared to gaze down below for a moment. Then he turned about, put the revolver barrel to his right temple and pulled the trigger.

There was a crashing report and he pitched forward, a gaping hole through his head.

"My God, Littell—my God, Littell!" Mr. X was crying as he leaped forward. "There's some mistake. There's some hellish mistake. *You* know none of those bullets was real. I saw to that myself. I made them myself. I—"

But the letter in the dead man's hand explained matters:

DEAR MR. X (OR MR. CLIVE PRENTISS, RATHER):

Sorry. No other alternative, though. I naturally realize, since you are the famous big game hunter and sportsman, that you simply wanted a traveling companion with fair nerve. Your bullets, of course, would all be harmless, so I will be forced to insert a real one as I turn my back and walk toward the window. You are a sportsman, and I know you will not welch on a bargain you have made. I bet my life on that, sir.

There is some satisfaction in knowing that the payment of the hundred thousand dollars will not bother you financially, as you have millions. I only ask you to see that the check reaches my lawyer before the fifteenth of this month. On that date the books of the Amalgamated International Bank will be examined. If your check reaches my lawyer before that date, I know that the bank will cover up my shortage of ninety-odd thousand dollars, and thereby I can atone for my crime and preserve the name of which my father was so proud.

JAMES CARTWRIGHT NICHOLS.

THE END.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Crime Circus," "The Silver Fang," "The Lost Punch," etc.

THE decision to become a writer of fiction was made for me by fate. In 1914, in Panama, where I spent a week when I was a wireless operator on a little steamer that creaked up and down the Central American coast, I met an author who painted the joys of free-lancing so vividly that I could not resist the call. We were drunk. I was twenty. Since then, I have been trying to catch up with all of those joys he mentioned.

Starting to write stories in 1914 and, four years later selling my first one, marks up, I suppose, a very poor batting average. But in those years I was getting experience, seeing the world, and acquiring knowledge. I "punched brass" as a wireless operator all over the Pacific. I entered Columbia University in 1915, and one year later left because I didn't believe in higher learning. I still don't believe in it. I became a newspaper reporter, later a magazine editor.

Then came the war, which I won practically single-handed by writing high-pressure publicity to induce patriotic Americans to send books to Washington for camp libraries for soldiers and gobs. Books came by the carload, by the ton: McGuffy's readers, old almanacs, spellers, arithmetics, out-dated novels and just trash. The soldiers and sailors who read those books soon hated the war so bitterly that they promptly got busy and ended it. That's how I won the war.

After the war, I wanted another look at China, and was sent to the Far East by Collier's to write articles on China, the Philippines, India and Malaya.

The first story I sold was written while I was editing a motion picture trade paper. It was bought by the ARGOSY, and it was about a wolf named Murg. Don't ask me why. In the intervening years I have written millions of words. Perhaps it is Murg who sits so patiently at my door!

I started writing fiction under the pen name of Loring Brent, because it would have annoyed the owner of the motion picture magazine to learn that I was writing fiction out of hours. He thought I fell asleep at my desk because I was working so hard for him! When my income from fiction exceeded my salary, I quit the job. Since then I have been free-lancing exclusively, except for a two-year period when I lived in a Florida swamp town and added to my writing the duties of postmaster, game warden and deputy sheriff. Out of that experience came a long series of stories about a Florida town I called Vingo.

I have enjoyed most writing stories about certain established characters. Apparently the most popular of these have been the Peter the Brazen, the Vingo and the Gillian Hazeltine stories. I stopped writing about Peter the Brazen (a swashbuckling wireless operator on ships in the China run) about ten years ago. He was, incidentally, the subject of the only novel I have had published in America. I am now starting a new series about him.

When I am not traveling I live in Westport, Connecticut. My interests are horses, sailing and flying. I took up flying about a year ago to write some articles on how it feels to learn to fly, and was badly bitten by the bug. I can make a three-point landing about five times out of ten.

I like New York, but would prefer to live in Honolulu. I smoke sixty cigarettes a day. I like murder trials. I have never mastered the noble game of poker, although I once wrote a book about it. In my spare time I study law and medicine. I have two young sons and a still younger daughter; an able crew for my sailboat—except that there is usually mutiny aboard the lugger!

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

MME. STOREY and Semi-Dual both please this reader. We have another Semi-Dual serial on hand, which will soon be running:

Chicago, Ill.

I never wrote to you before, but I have been a reader of ARGOSY and *Detective Fiction Weekly* for going on nine years. I do not care for the impossible stories like "Princess of the Atom," but I save them till I have the whole story; then if I run short of reading material I read those. I like the *Mme. Storey* and Semi-Dual stories. By the way, what has become of him?

I like the other stories, too, so I would say do not change the magazine, as some people like those impossible stories. Long may the ARGOSY live. I hardly can wait until Tuesday evening, when I get my two favorites, *Detective Fiction Weekly* and ARGOSY.

MRS. S. S. HOWARD.

A CHEER for "The Hawk of Hazard":

Springfield, L. I.

I sure do like your story, "The Hawk of Hazard." Please give us more of Oscar Friend's stories. They are different, and I'm now waiting for the November 9 edition to continue with a real good tale of Southern honor. Also I'm sure "The Snow Girl" is going to be good. "The Treasure on Skeleton Key" is a dandy. I hope your book keeps up its good work.

MABEL GRENAN.

HERE is a club for scientific fiction fans. ARGOSY, of course, assumes no responsibility for this organization. We simply pass on to you the letter of Mr. Ruppert, one of our readers:

Angola, Ind.

"Argonotes" has informed me of the fact that many readers are very much interested in the so-called impossible stories. Science fiction, to use its correct name. At present there exists in the United States an organization, the purpose of which is to spread the gospel of science and science fiction, the Science Correspondence Club. I am writing this to induce the readers of ARGOSY to join us. After reading this, pick up your pen or take the cover from your typewriter and send in an application for membership to our secretary, Raymond A. Palmer, 1431 38th Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, or our president, Aubrey Clements, 6 So. Hilliard Street, Montgomery, Alabama.

The club was formed by twenty young men from all over the United States. Now we have a roll of almost one hundred, all over the world. Its expressed purpose has been to help the course of science fiction, and to increase the knowledge of science. It also affords the advantage of being able to express your ideas in all fields.

Article Two of our constitution reads: The institution will remain an organization to establish better coördination between the scientifically inclined laymen of the world, regardless of sex, creed, color, or race. There will be no restrictions as to age, providing the member can pass an examination which shall be prepared by the membership committee.

The club will also publish a monthly bulletin, to which members may contribute. It will also publish clippings, articles, *et cetera*, dealing with science.

The membership will have no definite limit, and the correspondence will be governed by the wishes of each member.

I almost forgot to say that we have two of the best science fiction authors as active members, and three more who are doing their best to help, but because of much work cannot be active.

CONRAD H. RUPPERT.

* * *

(63)

NOW for some favorite stories:

Springfield, Mo.

My brother and I have been readers of your magazine for some time and think it is the best magazine on the market. I like the impossible stories best, while my brother likes Westerns best. Some of the stories we liked best were Seltzer's "Man-Hunt," Kline's "The Planet of Peril," Cummings's "The Shadow Girl," and "The Princess of the Atom," Hopper's "Jolly Flies the Roger,"

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

1-25

Dunn's "Beyond the Law" and MacIsaac's "Blood on the Snow." We want ARGOSY as it is.

ROSS WHITWORTH.

ANOTHER welcome for Bedford-Jones. We have one of his Chinese novelettes we shall publish before long. And speaking of Chinese stories—remember Peter the Brazen? Well, he is returning to ARGOSY in the very near future:

Mount Vernon, N. Y.

I'm inclosing my choice coupon for this week. I enjoyed Ray Cummings's "Snow Girl," and the novelette, "Draw a Gun!"

I did not like the new Western story, "The WH Brand," because— "The handsome strange cowboy, damsel in distress, a couple of villains and the poison waterhole!" Of course, the hero gets the girl and the ranch in the end. Read one of these Western stories and you've read them all.

You do have a nice variety of stories, which I guess please most all readers. I am glad to hear that H. Bedford-Jones is coming back; he is a most versatile writer. I particularly enjoy his Chinese stories.

ELSA KNIGHT.

Looking Ahead!

Another old-timer returns to Argosy!

GEORGE WASHINGTON OGDEN

NOTED WESTERN NOVELIST

again appears in our pages with his latest story, a novel of the West, of the cattle and sheep controversy; a story that is human throughout, yet tense and thrilling—

A Man From the Bad Lands

Two other outstanding features:

J. ALLAN DUNN
with a complete novelette of South Seas adventure
Glamour of Gold

CLEM YORE
with a dog story of the Northern wilds
Little Nort' Countree Voices

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Every railroader and his wife will thrill at the tenseness of this drama.

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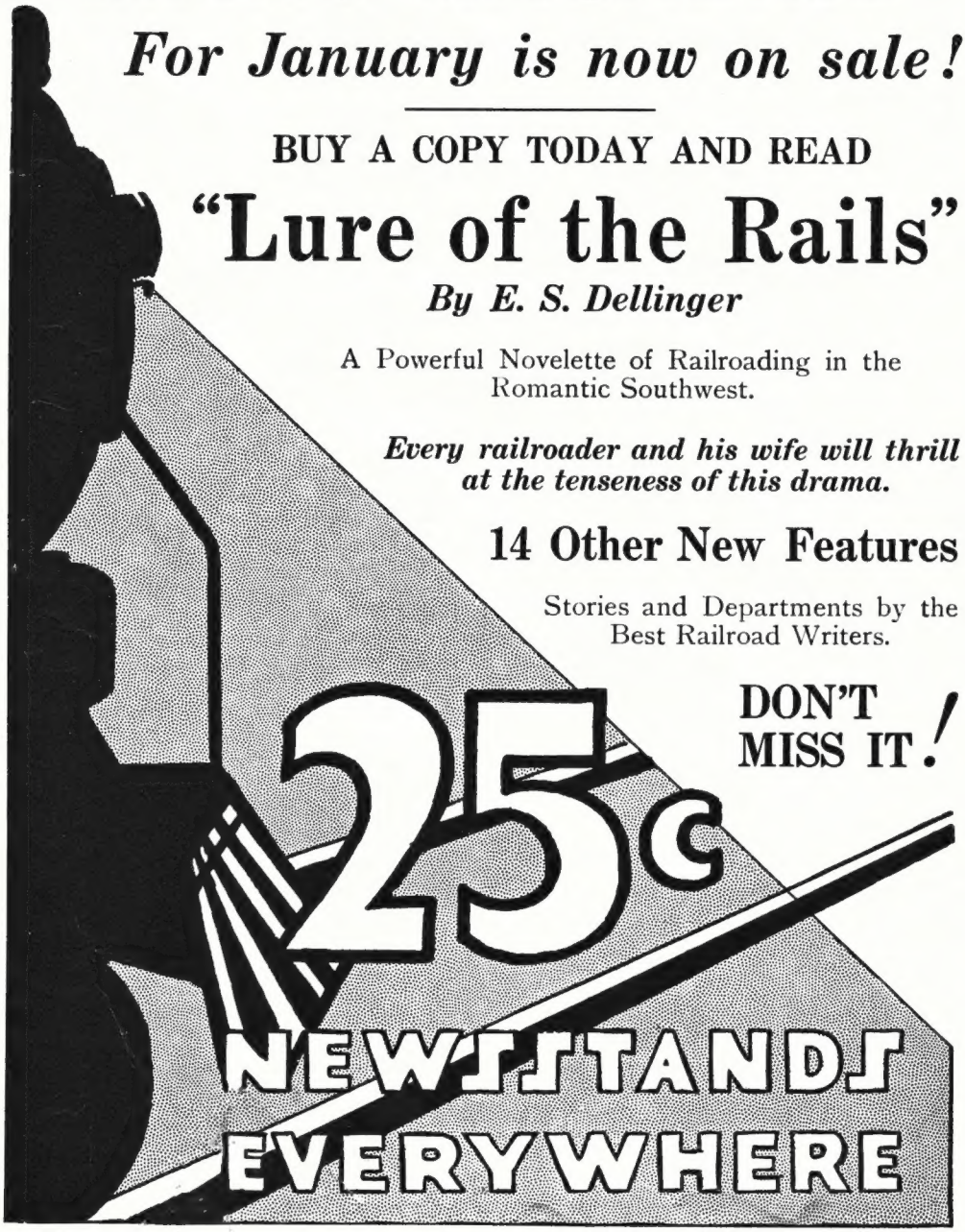

I do prefer
LUCKY STRIKE CIGARETTE
because
LUCKY STRIKE
"IT'S TOASTED"
CIGARETTES
Toasting removes dangerous irritants
that cause
throat irritation and coughing